



**COUNTY OF BUCKS  
DEPARTMENT OF  
EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS**

**TO: All Police, Fire and EMS Chiefs**

**FROM: Bucks County Radio Project Team, Emergency Advisory Committees**

**RE: Decision regarding encryption**

**DATE: October 25, 2012**

Dear Chiefs,

During the planning phase of the new digital P25 700 MHz radio system, we asked our system users about what was important for us to consider as we planned this project. Specific requests included improved communications and coverage, interoperability, and encryption. The County has worked diligently with the vendor and our advisory boards to try to best accommodate those demands.

In our existing system, all of our emergency responders have the ability to hear what's happening in their communities. This functionality is something that our police, fire and EMS responders rely upon for decision making and planning when emergencies arise within their local response areas. This intra-county interoperability is a critical element of our success in responding to the emergencies that we deal with everyday.

We tasked our advisory boards with resolving the conflict that exists regarding encryption. All three advisory boards gave direction that routine communication should be in the clear. That decision was presented to the body of the law enforcement community and it was met with a resounding "No." Our law enforcement community has given direction that they wish to have full encryption for all routine daily operations citing officer safety as the primary consideration for this need. Because of that conflict, the decision on what path to take was returned to the County.

The County met with the chairmen from the three advisory boards to discuss ways to best address this matter, and it is our decision not to provide a fully encrypted daily solution. Ultimately, the need for interoperability and responder safety overrides the demand for encryption. We will continue to allow all of our system users' access to daily, routine communications. Failing to address the needs of all of our emergency responders puts lives and property at risk which directly conflicts with our collective mission – public safety. We are planning for our future communication needs, and are making strides to provide all of our system users with the most robust and modern technology available.

The new radio solution will have encryption capability that will be available to the law enforcement community for sensitive or high security assignments that require security for those radio transmissions. The solution for this encryption is outlined below.

1. Zone traffic will remain "in the clear" on the new system.
2. Dedicated and encrypted TAC channels will be available to law enforcement system users for sensitive or critical incidents that require protected communication. If encryption is needed on the fly, the system has that capability built into it. The only users with access to the encryption will be law enforcement officials.
3. All law enforcement agencies have MDT equipment installed with our Computer-Aided Dispatch software which will allow for silent dispatch and communication that isn't broadcast over the clear channels.

4. Clear communications allow for inter-and intra-agency interoperability. When mutual aid is required from out of the county, or for large-scale incidents, having the transmissions “in the clear” will make for easier communications for all of those responders dispatched to the incident.
5. Isolating the daily traffic takes us backwards, and with a modern and sophisticated radio system, it would create a significant wall between the law enforcement community and the rest of our emergency responders that we cannot support.
6. It is imperative that we protect all of our system users and provide equal accessibility to our police, fire and EMS community.
7. The cost to provide that encryption capability on a fulltime basis would be an excessive burden for us all to bear. In today’s economic climate, we will be unable to fiscally support this encryption direction. The County has made a significant investment in providing this modern, state of the art communications system, and ultimately, we must be able to meet the needs of all of our users and adhere to federal interoperability requirements.



Robert G. Loughery, Commissioner



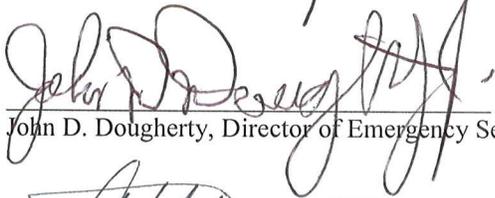
Charles Martin, Commissioner



Diane Ellis-Marseglia, Commissioner



Brian Hessenthaler, Chief Operating Officer



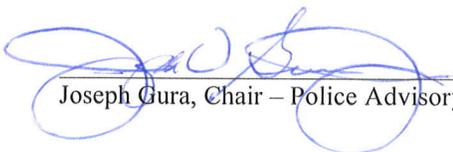
John D. Dougherty, Director of Emergency Services



Adam Selisker, Chair – Fire Advisory Board



Jason Dowd, Chair – EMS Advisory Board



Joseph Gura, Chair – Police Advisory Board