

Keep Tryst Emergency Communications Tower Public Forum
March 26, 2008

I would like to thank everyone for your attendance tonight at this public information meeting on the Keep Tryst Road Emergency Communications Tower. I like the Sheriff do understand that we have a significant communications issue within the southern end of Washington County. I know that the committee tasked with developing our future communications system has worked diligently to determine the best location for the installation of the tower and studied, as you have seen in this presentation, other alternative sites.

As the acting Division Director of Fire and Emergency Services, my department operates the current 911 emergency communications center and coordinates the county's emergency management functions. In addition, we provide the communications link for our career and volunteer emergency services providers serving each of you as residents of Washington County and surrounding jurisdictions.

My profession with emergency services has spanned over the past 27 years. The primary reason for my support of the communications tower at its proposed location exists not only in being the Director of Emergency Services, but more importantly as being a current volunteer first responder within the County. As an advanced life support provider and during my previous employment working in Baltimore County, Maryland, I was able to at any time, pick up a portable radio and seek medical direction from any of the many health care facilities or specialty referral centers in the State of Maryland. With that same portable, I could manage a patient's airway while at the same time request additional resources. A single communications device with the necessary coverage will allow me to enhance person's chances for survival from a medical or trauma emergency.

This is not about Baltimore County. This is about how this tower will affect a resident like you living in the southern part of Washington County? Very specifically, for a paramedic, certain medications and advanced life support procedures require medical direction. Medical direction is the communications that occurs between an emergency medical services provider and a physician located within a hospital facility. Without this capability, I as a paramedic with 27+ years experience will make a decision based upon my experience. Without the capability of portable communications, a new paramedic or a first responder may not be able to contact a physician and seek medical direction while at the patient's side. It may only occur after transportation is initiated to a local receiving hospital facility or through mobile radio once you are placed into the back of an ambulance. The difference in the level of care you receive and your long-term survivability can depend upon the ability of a first responder to communicate for medical direction. Seconds, if not minutes in the authorization of life saving procedures can be lost by the inability of an advanced life support provider to make contact with medical direction at the patient's side.

On September 15, 2004, at 9:30 pm, emergency services personnel were dispatched to Route 340 and Route 67 for a motor vehicle collision. Units arriving on the scene found

three patients of which two were critically injured. Their injuries required them to be transported of the highest priority for immediate treatment of their life threatening injuries. All of the patients were transported to a local trauma center for evaluation and treatment. For me as a paramedic, to seek additional resources such as aviation, (helicopter) transport, or to determine and consult with the specific hospital, I would have to leave the patient's side in order to communicate through mobile communications. I would not be able to both treat the patient while simultaneously seeking medical direction.

On the same date, approximately 25 minutes following the first incident, a second motor vehicle collision occurred at Keep Tryst Road and Route 340. This incident involved approximately 20 vehicles as a result of the previous incident. In this incident over 10 patients were evaluated and transported to various hospitals. During this incident, several patients that were initially transported to one facility were sent to a second facility after transport was initiated and mobile communications was obtained. I can only imagine the grief and confusion shared by a family of whom they are told is going to one facility and then transferred to another.

As our incidents become more complex and require a greater number of resources, emergency services personnel will rely on ability of effective communications by portable radio. Managing both your emergency and the County's resources will become more efficient and effective through the ability to communicate by a portable radio.

The communications system designed for Washington County has been designed around the ability of an individual to communicate through the use of a portable radio. Should a single provider respond to your home as a first responder and need immediate additional assistance for your care or ultimately their personal safety, this tower site is necessary.

In closing, the future of our County's Emergency Communications System and the coverage for all citizens, especially residents of South County is dependant upon this specific Keep Tryst tower site. I thank you for your time and ask that you send a letter in support of this site as described in this informational meeting.

Yours in service,

Kevin L. Lewis, Acting Director