

North Dakota County Wins Federal Funds To Help Pay Enhanced 9-1-1 Installation

An article in the April 1988 APCO BULLETIN led North Dakota's Morton County to apply for and win a federal grant to pay start-up costs for an Enhanced 9-1-1 system and rural addressing.

Michael Jochim, Morton County Coordinator of the Office of Emergency Management and Radio Communications, said, "As far as we can ascertain, Morton County is the first in the state and perhaps first in the nation to receive approval for a federal Community Development Block Grant for Enhanced 9-1-1."

On February 5, 1988, President Reagan signed into law the Housing and Community Development Act (PL 100-242) which contained language allowing some federal funds to be used in developing 9-1-1 emergency number systems.

Under the legislation, many communities throughout the country are now eligible to use up to 15 percent of their Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to defray the costs of installing and maintaining 9-1-1 systems. For a community to be eligible, at least 51 percent of the use of the system must be by persons of low and moderate income.

The initial grant application was submitted late last year. This summer town meetings are being held to explain the system to county residents. In November, voters will be asked to decide whether they want the system. It will cost them 50 cents a month.

The county has one year after approval to get the system up and running. Total cost for the two systems is estimated at \$194,500. Of that, \$88,500 would go for the phone system, technical equipment and electrical work. Rural address signs, mapping and technical assistance for rural addressing will cost about \$106,000. Money from the 50-cent

phone excise tax will go toward paying off loans used to purchase the equipment and street signs.

"What hurts counties most is start-up money, so that \$45,000 will really help," Jochim said. For the past two years, Jochim has served on the Governor's Enhanced 9-1-1 Committee which was set up by the legislature to develop standards and guidelines.

Recently Commissioner Richard Bendish, Jochim and Commissioner Bob Chase visited the university at St. Cloud, Minnesota, which is mapping addressing systems for Minnesota counties. "The trip was well worth it. We got ideas on how to design a system that is usable," Bendish said. He said he hopes a North Dakota college can map out a system for Morton County. One Minnesota county recouped the cost of university services by selling an atlas of the county.

Jochim said the Law Enforcement Center in Mandan, the County seat, receives about 50 emergency calls a month which pertain to the rural areas, including law enforcement, fire and ambulance calls in rural areas outside of Mandan served by those agencies. The figure does not include the rural areas outside the other five cities in Morton County which average about 15 emergency calls per year for each respective law enforcement, fire or ambulance service agency.

"It is estimated that approximately 10 percent of the rural emergency calls received, which require a response, have a delayed response due to improper instructions on how to proceed to the scene, or the response vehicle gets lost because there are no rural addressing signs to follow," Jochim said. "The average time of the delay in the response is approximately 30 minutes. Several incidents have been related to me where a faster response could have prevented extended suffering, additional injuries, the lack of medical care or additional property damage."

Jochim said some other significant reasons for delayed response time include locations, roads or landmarks that have pet names but are not commonly known; drivers who know the area must be summoned to lead the response to that location; several rural individuals own more than one rural residence or farm causing confusion in location; response agencies must be met at a main road so they can be led to the location or the victim must be moved from the location to a main road and wait for the response vehicle.

"In addition," Jochim said, "many response agencies do not have up-to-date information such as maps identifying locations, residences and county roads. The turnover in response personnel is a big problem as new individuals are not familiar with the area."

Start-up costs for the Enhanced 9-1-1 system are estimated at \$88,500, and \$106,000 for the rural addressing. Officials said two-thirds (\$59,000) of the Enhanced 9-1-1 System costs are applicable to rural areas and one-third (\$29,500) to urban areas. Rural Addressing system costs (\$106,000) are applicable only to rural areas.

Morton County's share for the whole project is \$123,750. The special telephone excise tax of 50 cents a month per telephone access line must be approved by the county's voters.

About 10,500 telephone lines are eligible for the telephone excise tax. The telephone companies would collect the excise tax from their subscribers, withhold \$.05 from each \$.50 collected as an eligible administrative fee, and pay the balance to Morton County.

The county would be required to pay the telephone companies a combined monthly fee of about \$1,200 for data base management. The county would realize an income from the telephone excise tax of about \$3,525 monthly or \$42,300 annual. The payback period to Morton County for the \$123,750 expenditure would be about three years, officials said. ■

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