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Vermont Legislative Research Shop

EMS and Fire Dispatch Funding

One of the byproducts of Chittenden County's inability to impose taxes has caused local officials and emergency staff to search for new funding mechanisms. By looking at other Vermont Counties and various New England states a number of avenues to circumvent the funding problem that currently exists.

In Lamoille County separate contracts are established between dispatch centers and each local government within the county. The burden of funding falls upon the budgets of local governments; the amount of money that each locality contributes varies in relation to its size and population, etc. The success of the emergency dispatch services are contingent upon the successful negotiation of these contracts. In various other counties that have been explored, property taxes are the main source of funds for emergency services. Within Windham County, the town of Putney expressed that EMS and the fire department are a local service provided through the taxing of its citizens. The same funding scheme is enacted throughout Caledonia County; municipalities' budget annual expenditures on EMS and Fire dispatch centers and then set local property taxes to take into account the allocated funds. St. Albans also funds their EMS and Fire dispatch centers through local property taxes. In the town of Brattleboro, local property taxes are also the source of funding but it was noted by the Chief of the Fire Department that Brattleboro differs from other communities in the sense that Ambulance services are provided privately. The EMS is still apart of the central dispatch center but they incur a regional charge of \$24,000 a year to have their calls dispatched. In Rutland, EMS is dispatched at the police department. The EMS system is funded by both the Rutland police and fire departments, however a portion of the money comes indirectly from the State of Vermont (Lt. Gino Rutland Police Dept.).

The state of Maine EMS communications department has stated that they too have faced funding problems in the past particularly in sponsoring their 911 services. In funding Maine Municipal and County 911 related equipment the state legislature either imposes surcharges on each telephone line or delegates this authority to cities and counties. Steve Bunker, Director of Operations for the state of Maine EMS communications, stated that the surcharge has often been set at approximately \$0.32 per phone line. However EMS equipment is primarily funded by the local tax base.

In both Vermont counties and in other New England states the funding for emergency services comes primarily through the ability of local towns and communities to raise and budget revenue through property taxes. When 911 first response programs are in place the central dispatch center, which in most cases is the state police, is funded through state taxes on phone service. Ultimately it is still up to the town to provide emergency service to its community; the 911 system is simply in place to forward calls to local dispatch centers.

