



MADISON COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

May / June 2008

By Steve DiGiovanna

"providing quality, professional customer service to the public and the five primary county service branches"

1. Law Enforcement
2. Fire
3. EMS
4. Public Works
5. County Administration

COPS Grant !!!!

The County Communication Department recently secured a \$35,000 state grant for more radios for law enforcement use.

The "COPS GRANT" was a part of the South Central Montana Interoperability Consortium request to the State of Montana.

Madison County was the only county out of all of the applicants to obtain their full request.

With State funds, the County will be able to purchase \$10,000 worth of Motorola Mobile Police radios and another \$25,000 towards Motorola portable radio units.

This is a big plus for our county communications operations and also a nice acquisition for the Sheriff's Office.

"The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the belief that reason and insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change or who are blinded by selfishness" - Edwin Friedman

Virginia City Repeater Tower - Update

A new Madison County repeater site located next to the FAA tower (near the Race-track adjacent to Virginia City Pass) is continuing to slowly move toward a start of construction date.

The tower is expected to cost between \$350,000 and \$450,000 dollars and is being funded by a PSIC (Public Safety Interoperability Communications) grant from the Federal Government -through the State of Montana.

Madison County has jumped (and is jumping) through the shrinking hoops of government bureaucracy and has entered the final stages of planning and approval.

The construction project is

currently being reviewed and assessed for the NEPA requirements (National Environmental Policy Act).

If the project passes through NEPA, we can start the extensive process of funding and contract awarding.

Madison County officials have already approved the "Statement of Work" - which spells out all of the specifics of the project.

Madison County had high hopes that this project would start sometime in early spring, but have been disappointed by a slower than expected approval process.

The main concern at this time is the diminishing

"construction weather window" - the amount of time necessary for the start through completion process.

Since Southwest Montana weather can change quickly and unexpectedly - there are only a handful of months that can guarantee equipment access to the site.

This repeater site will be a first class, Madison County operated repeater and should be "top of the line" in technology and function.

This new repeated should service a large portion of the Madison and Ruby Valleys and will serve as a main relay repeater for radio traffic throughout the county.

Captain Steve Orr Retires

One of the nicest and most supportive deputies of the Madison County Sheriff's Office has officially decided to retire - (sort of). Steve Orr, a longtime member of the department retired at the rank of Captain.

Steve started with the Ennis Police Department and became a full time Deputy Sheriff for Madison County over 20 years ago. Steve had been a Dispatcher, a County Detention Officer (Jail Officer) and a Reserve Deputy Sheriff for several years before deciding to make Law Enforcement a full time career.

Steve was involved in a number of infamously high profile incidents including the "Mountain Men Kidnapping" and the locally painful "Ennis Town Shootings".

Steve has been instrumental in a number of areas including the training and implementation of ICS / NIMS, SAR coordination, Traffic Safety Training and Radio Procedures and Protocol.

Fortunately for Madison County residents, Steve will remain a highly qualified Madison County Reserve Deputy, a firefighter for both Madison Valley Rural Fire Department and the Virginia City Fire Department - and plans to remain a committed and professional local public servant. Thank you for your service!



County Communications

I would like to take a few moments to focus on county communications - and the need to collectively work at improvement in 3 very general areas. I think it is important to recognize that the 3 subjects are really, three broad TOPICS – rather than 3 specific items for improvement. Before I get to these topics, it is important to recognize the following:

There are **ONLY TWO** basic ways to go about improving communications –

- A. through technology (in depth planning and spending money)
- B. through procedures (things we can do now)

I hope to address both – and work with all levels of county radio users to improve our communication activities. As I mentioned, I intend to do this collectively – in an effort to head off future issues that would reduce our effectiveness during significant events or worse - a countywide / area wide disaster.

The 3 main **TOPICS** I would like to address are:

1. **ramping-up our technology in infrastructure and facilities - (radios, repeaters and most importantly, communication survivability)**
2. **work to improve communication efficiency, communication procedures and radio professionalism countywide**
3. **enhance the perception and operational functionality of the dispatch office**

Our county has selfless and committed first responders - with a serious desire to provide top level, high quality service. However, our communications equipment, county infrastructure and emergency radio procedures are lagging far behind. Operationally, and in a number of different areas, we are not yet fully NIMS compliant and are suffering the affects of this deficit.

Situations have developed during a number of recent incidents that have exposed weaknesses in our communications procedures. There are solid indications that if we don't change in a number of areas, our county will suffer “**Communication Pile Up**” and communications paralysis during the next significant incident or disaster.

To put it bluntly – from a communication perspective, “the county is just flat set up for failure – we are just not prepared for much more than mundane, daily radio traffic”. I don't have all of the answers but we are working hard to find some viable solutions.

The cause for concern does not rest with any particular group or any single entity. The communication issues vary widely, are deeply ingrained - and may prove to be difficult or resistant to change.

However, **and I say this with strong conviction** - we can quickly improve overall efficiency, improve operationally - and ultimately improve emergency service – with the initial investment of only: 1. teamwork 2. commitment to protocol 3. the spirit of cooperation.

More to follow - next time

Sincerely

Steve DiGiovanna - DES 2 / Madison County Communications Coordinator