Montgomery County Completes Transition to New Public Safety Radio System

On Tuesday, December 8, 2020, the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety, in coordination with hundreds of partner agencies and with funding and support from the County Commissioners, successfully completed a transition to a new countywide 700/800 MHz radio communications system. The following day, at approximately 12 p.m., Director of Public Safety Thomas M. Sullivan made the announcement over all channels on the legacy system that it had been officially decommissioned.

“This transition is the culmination of thousands of hours of design, planning, preparation, and testing by our County staff, partner organizations, and contractors,” said Director Sullivan. “This new radio system will be a key asset in keeping Montgomery County residents and first responders safe for many years to come.”

Consistent with technology at the time of installation, the legacy system utilized hardline business-class Verizon T1 connections between communications towers and was vulnerable to rodent chews, tears during utility and street excavations, and water infiltration into cables. To remedy these problems, tower sites in the new system are connected by public safety grade wireless microwave transmitters and receivers.

The new system features ten additional tower sites strategically located across the County, bringing the total number to 30. This expansion allows for both increased redundancy and capacity. Instead of existing as stand-alone sites, the towers are now situated in two rings, east and west, that provide each site with two points of access to the system. The rings are self-recovering in event of a rare interruption in one direction, typically momentary lapses due to unusually severe weather. Even in this case, field users will not experience any degradation in service as the microwave system is designed to automatically divert communications in the opposite direction around the ring.

The new system also provides expanded capacity, allowing for more than twice the amount of simultaneous transmissions between field users when compared to the legacy system. In addition, there are more frequencies available for use, allowing Department of Public Safety Emergency Communications Center (ECC) staff to assign additional interoperable talkgroups, allowing for seamless interdisciplinary communications during complex and evolving emergencies and planned events.

Yet another advantage of the new system is the ability to provide non-contact, over-the-air programming of user radios by Department of Public Safety technicians. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to minimize close contact between critical employees who maintain the County radio system and field users and vehicles, many of whom and which are regularly exposed to individuals with infectious diseases, such as COVID-19.
Furthermore, the new system allows Department of Public Safety staff to dispatch from the back-up Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) at the Public Safety Training Campus in Plymouth Township, creating, for the first time, a truly redundant secondary PSAP. On the legacy system, Department staff could answer 9-1-1 and 10-digit calls from the back-up center and communicate via portable radio but could not dispatch incidents in the traditional sense.

On Tuesday, December 8, 2020, the transition began at 6 a.m., as police dispatch zones were switched to the new system, console by console. To ensure seamless communications with emergency responders, telecommunicators at the back-up site covered each zone while equipment was switched out in the ECC. In addition, Field Comm 1 and Field Comm 3 stood by at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), providing another level of redundancy in the event technicians encountered an unexpected error or difficulty during the transition. After each zone was moved to the new system, ECC staff performed a roll call of every on-duty police officer on new system channels to ensure that each had safely and successfully made the switch.

By 12 p.m., all 52 police departments across 12 dispatch zones, as well as CASE and relief positions, had been transferred to the new system. In the early afternoon, all 19 Montgomery County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies made the switch, followed shortly afterwards by the more than 90 fire companies and departments. There was no loss of continuity during the transition, as communications for ongoing incidents were allowed to continue on the legacy system. By 3 p.m., all agencies had been transferred to the new system, and at 4:18 p.m. the announcement was made that the legacy system would no longer be monitored by the ECC.

After the decommissioning of the legacy system on December 9, 2020, any user that attempts to switch his or her radio to legacy system channels will receive a constant audible “bonk” tone and will be unable to transmit. Over the next several months, Department staff will work to remove these legacy system frequencies from the more than 10,000 mobile and portable radios currently in the field. Individuals who monitor scanners as a hobby or for business will need to reprogram their scanners in order to hear fire and EMS incidents on the new radio system.

### From the Director’s Desk

**TO:** First Responders and Public Safety Stakeholders  
**FROM:** Thomas M. Sullivan, Director, MCDPS  
**RE:** Retirement

January 5, 2021 will be my final day as the Director of Public Safety. I have notified the Commissioners that I will be retiring on that date, after nearly 19 years working for the County. Throughout those years, it has been a privilege to have worked alongside this Department’s outstanding and dedicated professionals. I am honored to have been able to serve the citizens of Montgomery County as part of this team.

I am especially grateful to you, our first responders and other public safety stakeholders, who I have worked with both in my role for Montgomery County and as the Chairman of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Regional Task Force. Thank you for your partnership, collaboration, and expertise. Together, we have witnessed many significant improvements to the services that we all offer to our citizens, and I am grateful for all that you do.

I wish all of you both professional and personal success. I hope our paths cross in the future.
First EMS Personnel in Montgomery County Receive COVID-19 Vaccine

On Monday, December 28, 2020, Lieutenant Joe Yochim of Narberth Ambulance (below, left, at podium) and Battalion Chief Anthony McGrail of Second Alarmers Rescue Squad (below, right) became the first frontline Emergency Medical Services (EMS) providers in Montgomery County to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccines were administered by Dr. Alvin Wang, Chief Medical Officer for the Department of Public Safety and Montgomery County Regional EMS Medical Director (below, right).

In a joint operation between the Department of Public Safety and Montgomery County Office of Public Health, more than 400 EMS personnel received the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at the Public Safety Training Campus from December 28th through December 30th. Vaccination programs for other first responders will commence when supplies allow.

Upcoming EMS Training

Registration is open for two upcoming courses offered by the EMS Training Institute:

- **Instructor Methodology Course**
  - Dates: January 7*, 9†, 10†, 11*, & 14*, 2021
  - Times: Weekdays* 6:00 PM – 10:00 PM, Weekends† 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM
  - Location: Public Safety Training Campus
  - Cost: $135
  - Registration Deadline: January 4, 2021

- **Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)**
  - Dates/Times: This is a hybrid class. Assignments will be posted weekly beginning January 18, 2021. In-person practical sessions will be held at the PSTC beginning in May 2021.
  - Location: Remote/Public Safety Training Campus
  - Cost: $150 nonrefundable registration fee + $600 course fee
  - Registration Deadline: January 4, 2021

Register online at [https://www.emstrainingcenter.org/](https://www.emstrainingcenter.org/). For additional information, see the December 2020 Notices or contact the EMS Training Institute at (610) 278-2666.
Low-Interest Loans Available for Damage Sustained from Tropical Storm Isaias

On December 21\textsuperscript{st}, the U.S. Small Business Administration announced that low-interest disaster loans will be available for Montgomery County residents, businesses, and nonprofits affected by Tropical Storm Isaias on August 4, 2020. Business Physical Disaster Loans, Economic Injury Disaster Loans, and Home Disaster Loans are all available.

Applicants may apply online using the Electronic Loan Application (ELA) via the SBA’s secure website at \texttt{disasterloan.sba.gov}.

Businesses and individuals may also obtain information and loan applications by calling the SBA’s Customer Service Center at 1-800-659-2955 (1-800-877-8339 for the deaf and hard-of-hearing), or by emailing \texttt{DisasterCustomerService@sba.gov}. Loan applications can also be downloaded at \texttt{sba.gov/disaster}. Completed applications should be mailed to: U.S. Small Business Administration, Processing and Disbursement Center, 14925 Kingsport Road, Fort Worth, TX 76155.

The filing deadline to return applications for physical property damage is February 16, 2021. The deadline to return economic injury applications is September 20, 2021.

For more information, see the December 2020 notices or visit \texttt{https://bit.ly/3rnrd1m}.

Fire Academy Spring Schedule Released

On Monday, December 14\textsuperscript{th}, the Montgomery County Fire Academy released its Spring 2021 training schedule. Numerous online and hybrid offerings are available, in addition to the regular slate of in-person courses.

This semester, the Fire Academy will offer five (5) sessions of the Hazardous Materials Operations Refresher fully online. Both daytime and evening offerings are available. In addition, one (1) session, focusing on flammable liquids, will be offered in-person at the Fire Academy.

- **Online**
  - January 12 & 19 (7:00 – 10:00 PM)
  - January 25 & 27 (8:30 – 11:30 AM)
  - February 9 & 11 (8:30 – 11:30 AM)
  - February 10 & 17 (7:00 – 10:00 PM)
  - March 8 & 15 (7:00 – 10:00 PM)

- **In-person**
  - April 13 & 15 (6:45 – 10:45 PM)

Be sure to reserve your spot in one of these courses by registering soon. To view the complete training schedule, visit \texttt{https://www.montcopa.org/1006/Training-Schedule}. 
Recent Happenings

On Monday, November 30th at approximately 3:47 PM, an EF0 tornado with maximum wind speeds estimated at 70 miles per hour touched down in Montgomery Township. Numerous homes and businesses were damaged in its half mile path, but luckily no injuries or fatalities were reported. This is the second tornado to affect the County in 2020 (8/6/20 – Worcester Twp.).

On Tuesday, December 8th, Field Comm 1 (foreground) and Field Comm 3 (background) stood by at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for approximately 12 hours during the cutover to the new 700/800 MHz radio system, providing an added level of redundancy in the event technicians encountered an unexpected error or difficulty during the transition.

On Tuesday, December 15th, Department of Public Safety Emergency Communications and Emergency Management staff attended a demonstration of a potential new response asset. This rapidly deployable communications unit features the latest cameras, drones, and interoperability equipment meant to aid in situational awareness at an incident scene.
Firefighters Graduate from Entry Level Training

The Montgomery County Fire Academy held its second-ever virtual graduation ceremony on Tuesday, December 8th for the 39 firefighters of Class 2002, celebrating their successful completion of the Pennsylvania Entry Level Fire Fighter Training program.

After their training was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in March, the members of Class 2002 resumed classroom instruction and practical evolutions in July under strict mitigation measures. Their perseverance in working towards and achieving national Fire Fighter I certification during the pandemic is a testament to the dedication and resolve of these local emergency services professionals.

These men and women will protect their communities as firefighters in 24 volunteer and combination fire companies in Montgomery, Berks, Chester, and Delaware Counties. Thomas M. Sullivan, Director of the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety, offered the welcoming remarks and Thomas Cook, Pennsylvania State Fire Academy Administrator, served as the virtual Commencement Speaker.

Firefighter Sean DeMuynck of the Penn Wynne-Overbrook Hills Fire Company received the award for highest grade in Interior Firefighter. In addition, Firefighter Gregory L. Scott of the Fairmount Fire Company in Norristown graduated, becoming the first known Magisterial District Judge to complete the Pennsylvania Entry Level Firefighter Training program at the Montgomery County Fire Academy.

Congratulations and best wishes for a safe career to the following graduates:

- Firefighter Nicholas D. Anderson, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Lorenzo V. Castelo, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Michael Chadwell, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Sean DeMuynck, Penn Wynne – Overbrook Hills Fire Co.
- Firefighter Shane A. Dugan, Upper Pottsgrove Twp. Fire Co.
- Firefighter Kyle M. Eshbach, Red Hill Fire Co.
- Firefighter Chad L. Esher, Radnor Fire Co.
- Firefighter Felicity Evans, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Christopher Garland, Merion Fire Co. of Ardmore
- Firefighter Jason D. Gresh, Gilbertsville Fire Co.
- Firefighter Emily A. Henry, Red Hill Fire Co.
- Firefighter Jacob A. Homola, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Charles I. Johnson, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Richard Jones, Fairmount Engine Co. (Norristown)
- Firefighter Chase E. Keck, Norco Fire Co.
- Firefighter Evan Kelly, Gilbertsville Fire Co.
- Firefighter Gabriel V. Leskusky, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Jennifer Lofaro, Gladwyne Fire Co.
- Firefighter Colin B. McCarty, Llanerch Fire Co.
- Firefighter Sean P. Meals, Gladwyne Fire Co.
- Firefighter Philip A. Mills Jr, Middletown Fire Co.
- Firefighter Andrew D. Morrison, Merion Fire Co. of Ardmore
- Firefighter Bryan Nuss, Fort Washington Fire Co.
- Firefighter John Phelan, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter David Randazzo, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Quinten Santoro, Broomall Fire Co.
- Firefighter Benjamin Schmid, Penn Wynne – Overbrook Hills Fire Co.
- Firefighter Gregory L. Scott, Fairmount Engine Co. (Norristown)
- Firefighter Mason Sergas, Limerick Fire Dept.
- Firefighter Michael Shaw, Jefferson Fire Co.
- Firefighter Zachary Shenk, Western Berks Fire Dept.
- Firefighter Jaron P. Stake, Bryn Mawr Fire Co.
- Firefighter Steven J. Sutton Jr, Bryn Athyn Fire Co.
- Firefighter Garrett Thompson, Broomall Fire Co.
- Firefighter Curtis M. Waltemyer, Trappe Fire Co.
- Firefighter Richard W. Webster, Trappe Fire Co.
- Firefighter Edward White Jr, Jefferson Fire Co.
Making Sense of Winter Weather Products

With the first significant snowfall of the 2020-2021 winter already in the books, Department of Public Safety staff would like to remind responders about three important seasonal products: Code Blue, the Weekly Winter Weather Outlook, and Situational Awareness Notices.

**Code Blue**

A Code Blue Cold Weather Health Emergency will be issued by the Department of Public Safety when the temperature and/or wind chill is expected to be at or below 20° Fahrenheit. A Code Blue may also be declared during special circumstances, such as when there is significant snowfall forecast with temperatures and wind chills just above the guidelines. During a Code Blue, multiple Montgomery County agencies and private health/social organizations will offer expanded services for those without adequate shelter, including the chronically homeless and homeless families with children. Residents of Montgomery County who need shelter during a Code Blue can call the Your Way Home Call Center at 2-1-1 or text 898-211.

**Weekly Winter Weather Outlook**

The Department of Public Safety distributes a Weekly Winter Weather Outlook on Tuesdays in November, December, January, February, and March. Using National Weather Service forecasts, Department of Public Safety staff will classify the probability of cold weather (temperature and/or wind chill at or below 20° F) and measurable winter precipitation for each day in the following week using a three-level scale: Unlikely, Possible, or Likely. The document is intended to provide advance awareness about impending winter weather that could trigger a Code Blue declaration or Emergency Operations Center activation.

The intended audience for the Outlook is Code Blue community shelter stakeholders, staff of various Montgomery County departments and offices, and municipal emergency management coordinators. The document is not intended to be released to the general public and is for operational planning purposes only.

**Situational Awareness Notices**

Prior to any significant weather event in their coverage area, the National Weather Service – Mt. Holly produces detailed briefing packages and sends them to county partners. Any package which has relevance to Montgomery County and describes a situation in which at least moderate impacts in the County are expected will be distributed by the Department of Public Safety to stakeholders as part of a Situational Awareness Notice. Note that many briefing packages produced by NWS – Mt. Holly are not considered relevant to Montgomery County responders. For example, some packages are issued for Coastal Flood Advisories, while others concern snow that will only affect the Poconos.

The Situational Awareness Notice will also include a Montgomery County-specific narrative of preparations, timing, and expected impacts. Should the event warrant a Watch Desk or Emergency Operations Center activation, Situational Awareness Notices will transition to Situation Reports.
**Cradlepoint Modem Deployment Continues**

The Department of Public Safety will soon be receiving another batch of modems and antennas for emergency responder vehicles acquired through the Homeland Security Grant Program. Department staff have so far deployed a total of 330 modems to 32 police departments, approximately 200 of which are already installed and in use. This next batch of modems will allow the Department to outfit the remainder of police units throughout Montgomery County.

Several of the remaining police departments have already completed the process to submit information to the Department of Public Safety and they will be deployed first from this new batch. If your police department has not yet submitted the below information, please do so as soon as possible.

In order to receive the new modems, please email the following information to DPSCADHelp@montcopa.org:

- Agency Name
- Agency Contact(s) who are authorized to sign for and pick up equipment for the agency
- Vehicle list with car numbers of vehicles currently equipped with Sierra Wireless modems

All responder agencies are required to switch to these new modems as the Sierra Wireless modems are end-of-life and are no longer being repaired by the manufacturer.

The modems and antennas are being provided free of charge in a 1-for-1 swap for the old Sierra Wireless modems. Agencies are responsible for installation charges and carrier data plans. These new modems and antennas provide better speed and coverage as they capable of accessing all 4G frequencies, many of which had not been deployed by the cell carriers during initial Sierra Wireless deployment.

These new devices, along with upgrades made to our servers, now allow us to be carrier agnostic, meaning if another wireless carrier has better coverage in your response area, you are now able to utilize them. Agencies MUST advise the Department of Public Safety before any carrier changes are made and you MUST have a Cradlepoint installed before doing so. The Sierra Wireless modems are tied to Verizon and cannot be switched.

**Windows 7 End-of-Life for MDCs Announced**

The Department of Public Safety recently completed a Pennsylvania State Police CLEAN (Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network) Technical Audit. To maintain CLEAN and CJIS (Criminal Justice Information Services) Compliance, as of July 1, 2021, Windows 7 based Mobile Data Computers (MDCs) will no longer be permitted to connect to the Public Safety network for CAD or MPS (Mobile for Public Safety). All MDCs (police, fire and EMS) must be upgraded to Windows 10 Pro prior to this date.

If you are still using Windows 7 after June 30, 2021, your computer will be blocked from the network. If your hardware is aging, now is the time to start planning for replacements.

If your agency needs assistance with hardware specifications or upgrade assistance, please email DPSCADHelp@montcopa.org and Department of Public Safety – Technology Division staff will be happy to assist where possible.
Career Opportunities

The Department of Public Safety is currently accepting applications for numerous openings. Click on the hyperlinks below for full job descriptions and to apply online.

**Emergency Communications Division**
- Telecommunicator

**Technology Division**
- Public Safety GIS Analyst
- Senior Technician

**Office of the Medical Director**
- Mobile Integrated Health Coordinator
- Mobile Integrated Health - Paramedic

**EMS Division**
- Health and Safety Specialist
- Training Coordinator - EMS

**COVID-19 Logistics Program**
- COVID-19 Logistics Program Manager
- COVID-19 Logistics Program Specialist

**COVID-19 Pandemic: Key Information for First Responders**

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

The Department of Public Safety continues to fulfill critical need resource requests for first responder agencies during the COVID-19 crisis. As normal supply chains continue to come back online, please utilize your local procurement procedures prior to submitting resource requests. If you do have a critical PPE need, please submit all resource requests to EOCwatchdesk@montcopa.org.

**Exposure Reporting Process**

If you are a first responder (law enforcement, fire, EMS, or emergency management) and believe you were exposed to COVID-19 in the course of your duties, follow these steps:

1) Immediately notify your supervisor or agency infection control officer.

2) Avoid contact with others, maintain social distance (at least 6 feet), and self-monitor for symptoms (check temperature twice a day and watch for fever, cough, or shortness of breath). You will receive formal instructions to quarantine, if necessary, from the Montgomery County Office of Public Health.

3) Complete the First Responder Self-Report Form: [http://episurvey.mcad911.com/EpiInfoWebSurvey/Home/a85581e8-ef39-478d-ad2c-76bbf1a44b50](http://episurvey.mcad911.com/EpiInfoWebSurvey/Home/a85581e8-ef39-478d-ad2c-76bbf1a44b50). This form is used to formally document the impact of COVID-19 on the community as well as document the source of a potential exposure.

4) Register to be tested. You can receive a test at any one of the 6 county-run test sites (https://data-montcopa.opendata.arcgis.com/pages/covid-testing-page), through your Primary Care Physician, or at a commercial lab.

First responders with exposure-related questions may contact EMS Field Specialist Ed Martin, Jr. (emartin@montcopa.org) or Chief Medical Officer and Regional EMS Medical Director Dr. Alvin Wang (awang@montcopa.org). With immediate concerns, call (610) 631-6500.