

911

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ter or police station. The county has 10 proposed secondary call-taking and dispatching centers manned round-the-clock, one of which is the local center, known as Back Mountain Control.

The others are Wilkes-Barre City, Hazleton, Nanticoke, Pittston, West Pittston, Kingston, Swoyersville, Hanover Township and Wilkes-Barre Township. Not all may decide to become secondary dispatching points in the proposed county-wide system.

The proposed system would be funded by a monthly charge of approximately \$1.25 per telephone number, with the telephone companies (Commonwealth in the Back Mountain and Bell in the valley) acting as collection agents.

In the Back Mountain alone, there are an estimated 14,200 telephone lines, which would generate \$212,160 per year based on a \$1.25 per month charge, or \$169,728 yearly based on a \$1.00 per month charge, Michael Richcrick, the county's 911 consultant said.

Back Mountain Control's yearly budget is \$152,806, according to figures supplied by treasurer Jeffrey Box.

Although that looks like a lot of money, Richcrick said that to make the Back Mountain a sophisticated enhanced 911 system comparable to the county's plan but operating completely on its own would cost \$435,000 during the first year alone for new equipment and the computer system and database.

Adding a yearly operational cost of \$136,000, it would cost the Back Mountain a whopping \$979,000 in the first four years.

"The database, equipment and computers cost \$435,000, whether it's for the Back Mountain or for the entire county," O'Brien said. "Getting this setup through Luzerne County would save you the startup costs."

He added that the county could also reimburse up to 60 percent of personnel costs for the secondary answering points.

Bader said that there are several different types of 911 systems, ranging in service and cost from the most basic, which he says we have already, to the very best.

Upgrading the Back Mountain's system could cost anywhere from \$8,400 per year for improved incoming telephone lines and equipment to the most highly sophisticated system costing several thousand dollars per month, which can tell the dispatcher

"We're counting on the people to then complain to their elected officials that they're being billed for a service that they're not getting."

Kevin O'Brien

Luzerne County 911 director, explaining a strategy to force the county's 911 plan on reluctant towns

nearly everything about the caller except what he ate for breakfast, Bader said.

Although plans for the proposed county-wide 911 system have progressed during the past year, it still has several problems to work out.

• Funding is still a major thorn in the side of Back Mountain Communications Center officials, who say that assessing each resident \$1.25 per telephone in addition to the money which member municipalities already pay to run their center is double taxation.

Once the state approves Luzerne County's 911 plan, which could happen as early as August, 1994, the county can legally begin to collect the \$1.25 fee, even if it doesn't have any equipment yet.

The county has three years from the time that its plan is approved to get its 911 system on line. Act 78 says that if the county decides for any reason not to implement its plan within three years of approval, the county may either keep all of the money which it has collected or return it to the member municipalities. Whether or not it is then returned to the people who paid is not specified.

• If a municipality chooses not to be part of Luzerne County's 911 system, its residents will still be billed for the service.

"We're counting on the people to then complain to their elected officials that they're being billed for a service that they're not getting," O'Brien said.

• One of the biggest hurdles is compiling the database, a master address guide which would also have to be able to locate rural route addresses and box numbers. For example, some homes with Lehman mailing addresses are actually in Harveys Lake, while a sizeable chunk of Kingston Township is a Wyoming rural route.

The county plans to ask the post office for help in setting this up. "We'll even ask the rural route carriers if we have to," O'Brien said.

• The Back Mountain's five telephone exchanges (477, 696, 674,

675 and 639) cover 11 municipalities in three counties.

Some of the 639 Harveys Lake exchange overlaps into Wyoming County, while 477 also reaches parts of Sullivan County.

Franklin Township uses 675 (Dallas), serviced by Back Mountain Control, and 333, serviced by Wyoming County, whose zoned 911 system went on line several years before the Back Mountain's.

Compounding the confusion, certain Shavertown (696) telephone numbers are actually in Jackson Township, which also uses 675 (Dallas) and the 779 Plymouth exchange.

"You can't divide the area by municipalities," said Dallas Township police chief Carl Miers. "You have to go by telephone exchanges."

• The state police, who service smaller municipalities which can't afford their own departments, won't participate in the 911 system.

"They don't want the equipment," O'Brien said.

The county 911 would take their calls and forward them to the appropriate state police barracks.

• Agreements with neighboring counties must be worked out.

For example, Back Mountain Control services Franklin Township residents on the 675 telephone exchange, while Wyoming County dispatches calls from the township's 333 exchange.

Kunkle Fire and Ambulance Company services Dallas Township in Luzerne County and also Monroe Township in Wyoming County.

• Radio frequencies for police, fire and ambulance companies may change, and the change could be expensive.

According to Back Mountain Firefighters' Association president and Kunkle fire chief Jack Dodson, eight area fire companies use the Back Mountain fire frequency. Some also have their own private fire channels.

If they must change their frequency or use Luzerne County's fire channel, it could cost a lot of money which the volunteer companies don't have.

Although state money is available to help fire and ambulance companies purchase new equipment, it doesn't cover upgrading existing equipment. Fire companies would have to get low-interest loans.

"Kunkle alone has 40 pagers," Dodson said. "To change the channels would cost \$100 apiece, or \$4,000. That's not counting the portable radios, base unit and truck radios."

Dodson estimates that each fire company has one base unit, an average of six to eight portables and between three and four truck radios, depending on how many vehicles each company has.

Although some fire and ambulance radios are programmable, others use crystals which can cost up to \$200 each, Dodson said. It costs \$25 to reset the programmable radios.

"The Back Mountain is one of the best mutual aid groups in the area," Dodson said. "We would like to keep it together. I'm sure that we can work together and accomplish this."

Holistic Consortuim to hold Market Day November 28

The Holistic Consortium of Northeastern Pennsylvania will be holding its semi-annual gathering and Market Day on Sunday, Nov. 28 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Northmoreland Twp. Fire Hall in Centermoreland.

Throughout the day there will be many free lectures and performances of music. A Kung-Fu group will also perform martial arts techniques and Tai-Chi.

There will be groups who deal in Herbal Remedies/Healing and

many people who are Organic Farmer/growers along with the Food Co-ops.


Vegetarian and baked goods will be offered as well as the crafts of pottery, original jewelry, oils, incense, and crystals.

The feature of the day will be the Rainbow Raffle, in which an item from each vendor or service will be offered to be raffled off at the end of the day.

The public is welcome. There is a \$1.00 donation at the door.

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