

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive

SUSAN TOLCHIN, Director of Communications

**CONTACT: SUSAN TOLCHIN  
LYNNE BEDELL**

**(914) 995-2932**

**(914) 995-3106**

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## **NEW RADIO SYSTEM WOULD ALLOW FOR BETTER EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION** **Fire, ambulances, police could talk during major incident; bus drivers would use on daily basis**

A new \$11.9 million communications system will vastly improve the way emergency personnel talk to each other during major incidents in Westchester County and better protect the public.

For example, in a major emergency or in the case of two simultaneous situations, responders would no longer have to share a single radio channel – listening to everyone else’s conversations, filtering out what they need to know, and trying to get a word in edgewise. With the system being developed, agencies would be able to set up as many as a dozen separate conversations at once and pull whatever agencies were needed into the discussion.

“Having more controlled and widespread communication will make it infinitely easier to handle any kind of major emergency event,” said County Executive Andy Spano. “If the different agencies such as police, fire and ambulance are better able to connect with each other at any given moment, it would mean a much more coordinated and effective response. We need to be a leader in implementing this type of technology.”

Not only will the system be used for dispatch and coordination during major mutual aid incidents, but it will also handle routine communications on a daily basis for the county’s Bee-Line bus system. The buses play a big role in assisting in evacuations. Currently the buses operate with no radios and very limited alternative communications.

Westchester County recently signed a contract with Motorola to design, construct and implement a voice and wireless data communications system. The comprehensive system will allow the county’s Emergency Communications Center (ECC-60 control) to dispatch local fire departments and EMS agencies, as well as giving those departments the ability to talk to each other as they head to the scene of an incident.

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Spano noted that the potential uses for the system are almost unlimited. Emergency responders coming upon scenes involving a medical condition or crime situation would be able to communicate quickly with police departments and other responders. In the case of a widespread evacuation involving bus transportation, officials will be able to communicate with the drivers doing the pickups. In the case of a bus accident or emergency on the vehicle, a bus driver could call for assistance.

"We rely on first responders to provide emergency services in thousands of communities throughout the United States," said Ken Denslow, Motorola corporate vice president and general manager. "The new communications network will enhance the ability of these responders to serve and protect the public during major emergencies by connecting local units to county dispatch and to other working units at the scene of a major emergency. Interoperability among first responders is essential for public safety. We are proud to be part of Westchester County's innovative vision to provide interoperability for all those agencies who handle emergencies."

Installation of the system components will be started this spring, with activation anticipated for the end of the year. County Chief Information Officer Norman Jacknis noted that the process will take time as the set-up is complicated and users will have to learn new technology. Radio equipment and systems must also be installed at existing radio tower sites and connections made to the county's fiber-optic network.

The county will also provide and install radios in more than 600 front line emergency fire and EMS vehicles, all of the Bee-Line fleet, as well as local police department headquarters and hospital emergency rooms around the county.