

MEDIA RELEASE

ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY



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Next Generation Public Safety Radio System updates continue

Erie, PA – The Erie County Department of Public Safety continues to improve the accessibility and coverage of the Next Generation Public Safety Radio System. The department, in close partnership with first responders, has worked diligently to identify geographical locations experiencing a lack of coverage across Erie County. While COVID-19 has interrupted work across the globe, the county has continued to work to solve the issues as quickly as possible.

EF Johnson, the contractor for the new radio system, investigated these areas of concern, determined the factors impacting call quality/coverage, and made recommendations to improve coverage. All parties involved then came together and worked out a plan with how to deal with the coverage issues.

A main cause of delay is the FCC licensing process, which requires Canadian approval to avoid potential interference issues across Lake Erie. Any subsequent changes must go back to Canada for approval. The initial licensing process took five years. The final approval resulted in a negative impact on allowable transmit power, which consequently impacted coverage areas in specific geographical locations across Erie County.

Since the release of the EF Johnson recommendations/plan on Monday, Feb. 24, 2020, the following enhancements have been made:

- Mobilcom inspected the installation of mobile radios in emergency vehicles to ensure they are functioning properly, and a system-wide software update has taken place, with priority given to addressing the North East area mobile and portable radios first.
- A stronger antenna has been installed at Mercyhurst University North East Campus, improving signal strength in the Borough of North East.
- In coordination with the commonwealth, improvements have been made to state-owned antennae, resulting in improved radio frequency signaling in eastern Erie County and 360-degree coverage in southwestern Erie County.

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- A mobile communications tower will be placed at the North East Marina as a temporary solution to improve radio frequency signaling in northeastern Erie County. The final delivery of the radio equipment has been received from EF Johnson, and Mobilcom is installing the equipment. The deployment of the mobile communications tower will take place no later than Aug. 31, 2020.
- FCC licensing applications have been filed for the “Ripley” tower site as the permanent solution for the North East area and the “Edinboro University” tower site for the Edinboro and McKean areas. Once approved, the equipment (as determined by the FCC licensing) will be ordered, and the implementation process will begin.

“The concerns expressed in the most recent correspondence from our first responders are valid, and county officials share the concerns,” said John Grappy, director of Erie County Department of Public Safety. “Public Safety officials have discussed the lack of coverage, which was identified during field coverage testing with EF Johnson prior to and post cutover to the county’s new radio system. We have consistently expressed the sense of urgency to resolve the coverage issues.”

EF Johnson is ultimately responsible to ensure the coverage requirements have been met at no additional cost to Erie County, and will be held to the contractual obligations. Additional coverage testing will be conducted prior to final acceptance of the radio system. Erie County wants to ensure the improvements have been completed prior to additional coverage testing being conducted.

“On behalf of Erie County, I want to assure everyone the final completion of our new county radio system will not occur until Erie County officials, in conjunction with our first responders, are satisfied that coverage requirements have been met across Erie County. In the meantime, we’re doing everything we can to improve the situation until we can get a permanent solution in place,” said Dahlkemper.

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