



The Chairman's Corner

by

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NEW 9-1-1 TOWERS

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The 9-1-1 communications system is something most of us probably don't give much thought to on a daily basis. Then, suddenly, I think we can all agree, through something like a health crisis or a car accident, the need for emergency services becomes instantly critical. At that point, effective communications can become a matter of life and death.

In Columbia County, the Emergency 9-1-1 Emergency Communications Department, led by Director Rob Lopez, has become the nerve center for emergency response. It is the liaison between the public and the first responder community.

Under a \$3.5 million National Interoperability grant to construct three new towers and "load them with our infrastructure that is basically for fire, rescue, and police," Director Lopez said, the county has been busy erecting those towers, with the entire project heading to completion. "The site locations – New Lebanon, Chatham, and Gallatin – were chosen to mitigate our gaps in our Land Mobile Radio coverage areas."

As a requirement of the grant, he added, "the county would deploy the National Interop channels. Those were designed so that if an incident was a multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline event, you had a common platform to operate on, so if the resources were coming from outside of our county, and they were on a different radio platform or spectrum, they could still talk with us. Being on a common platform in public safety is a huge issue."

"We use multiple systems to accomplish our tasks but one is a vital link for communicating with our first responders," Director Lopez continued. "This is accomplished using a county radio communications system that spans 648 square miles throughout the County. Essential to emergency responses, our system must be an effective system, free from any gaps, for first responders to rely on."

The Columbia County 9-1-1 department is responsible for dispatching 31 fire companies and five ambulance services – including acting as the system status controllers of the county's EMS system (moving ambulances around the county as needed and dictated by call volume). The 9-1-1 department also dispatches the New York State Police, Columbia County Sheriff's Office, and five local police departments to emergency 9-1-1 calls.

The department is also responsible for dispatching the county's fire and EMS coordinators, the Emergency Management Office, a hazmat team, a cause and origin team, and numerous other agencies, including utility companies and highway departments as needed. It serves as liaison between the county and the National Weather Service during times of severe weather outbreaks and are responsible for activating the Emergency Alert System should a major incident threaten the county.

"One of the biggest things with what we've been doing is improving our redundancies" when it comes to communications, noted Director Lopez, "so if we lose something, we're not as affected as we would have been years ago. That's a good thing because we can survive and still have a stable platform to operate on."

Director Lopez strongly advises county residents to make use of the NY-Alert system for critical and emergency alerts. Visit <https://alert.ny.gov> for free signup and set the alerts that interest you. They can be received via phone, email, text, and fax.