



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** December 9, 2003

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT:** CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS DURING A DISASTER (District: All)

**SUMMARY:**

#### **Overview**

During the Viejas Fire in 2001, the Regional Communications System (RCS) experienced significant busy signals as public safety officials attempted to relay vital information to one another. Radio communication was difficult during the Pines Fire in 2002, as once again the Eastern portion of the RCS was unable to handle the increased volume of calls during a short period of time. This was due to the significant number of radio users on the system during the fire. Not surprisingly, public safety officials were hampered like never before as they attempted to communicate during the Cedar, Paradise and Otay fires, only to repeatedly get busy signals on their radio in the Northern, Southern and Eastern portion of the RCS.

The safety of the public, firefighters and law enforcement officers is severely jeopardized when critical information cannot immediately be exchanged on a communication system. The County and other members of the Regional Communications System should not wait until the next disaster before action is taken to enhance the capacity of our system.

#### **Recommendation(s)**

##### **VICE CHAIRWOMAN JACOB AND SUPERVISOR SLATER**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to evaluate the performance of the Regional Communications System during the Cedar, Paradise and Otay fires, and report back to the Board of Supervisors within 45 days with recommendations to address gaps in coverage, duration of busy signals during the fires and interaction with other communication systems.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to report back to the Board of Supervisors within 45 days with immediate funding options for necessary enhancements to the Regional Communications System.

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**Fiscal Impact**

There is no fiscal impact resulting from these actions.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Regional Communications System (RCS) contains three loops (coverage areas) – North, South and East. At the time of planning the system, it was determined that the North and South loop would be on a simulcast system and the East loop would be on an intellireapter system. During the Viejas Fire in 2001, the Regional Communications System experienced significant busy signals as public safety officials attempted to talk to one another. In an effort to secure funding for needed enhancements to the system, the Board of Supervisors took action on February 6, 2001 to submit a grant application to the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) for over \$6 million to offset the costs for enhancing the East loop. Unfortunately, the DOJ did not award grant funding to the County for this project.

Radio communication was difficult during the Pines Fire in 2002, as once again the East loop of the RCS was unable to handle the increased volume of calls during a short period of time. This was due to the significant number of radio users on the system during the fire. Not surprisingly, public safety officials were hampered like never before as they attempted to communicate during the Cedar, Paradise and Otay fires, only to repeatedly get busy signals on their radios in the Northern, Southern and Eastern portion of the RCS.

Given the astonishing speed of the Cedar Fire during the first 24 hours, every second was critical for firefighters and law enforcement officers. Lives were at risk because the location and direction of the fire couldn't be communicated. If their actions are decided in an instant, then their radio system must maintain that same pace. During the wildland fires in October, there were 34,798 busy signals on the South loop. Even worse, the East loop experienced a staggering 64,520 busy signals. The RCS currently supports over 16,000 radios, despite the fact that it was designed to accommodate 12,000 radios.

The safety of the public, firefighters and law enforcement officers is severely jeopardized when critical information can't immediately be exchanged on a communication system. The County and other members of the Regional Communications System can't wait until the next disaster before action is taken to enhance the capacity of the system. Improvements are needed to the East, North and South loops. All three areas are in need of enhancements to handle the additional number of users on the system in times of an emergency.

Today's action will initiate a review of the Regional Communications System so that the Board of Supervisors has a better understanding of the deficiencies of the current system. The Chief Administrative Officer will also be reporting back to the Board with immediate funding options for necessary enhancements or expansion of the Regional Communication System. We urge your support.

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Respectfully submitted,

DIANNE JACOB  
Vice Chairwoman

PAM SLATER  
Supervisor, Third District

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**

**CONCURRENCE(S)**

<b>COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
Written Disclosure per County Charter Section 1000.1 Required	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>GROUP/AGENCY FINANCE DIRECTOR</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Requires Four Votes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>GROUP/AGENCY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A

**Other Concurrence(s):**

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** Board of Supervisors, District Two  
Board of Supervisors, District Three

**CONTACT PERSON(S):**

Jeff Collins	Joe Sheffo
_____ Name	_____ Name
619-531-5522	619-531-5533
_____ Phone	_____ Phone
_____ Fax	_____ Fax
_____ Mail Station	_____ Mail Station
_____ E-mail	_____ E-mail

**AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**  
(continued)

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:**

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**

**CONTRACT NUMBER(S):**

**SUBJECT:** CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS DURING A DISASTER (District: All)

**FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**DEPARTMENT:**

**PROGRAM:**

**PROPOSAL:**

FUTURE YEARS ESTIMATED BUDGET OF PROPOSAL IF ADOPTED				
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
Budgeted Amount For Proposal	Proposed Change in Budgeted Amount	Proposed Revised Current Year Budget (a+b)	1st Subsequent Year	2nd Subsequent Year

Direct Cost

Revenue/Other Offset

**NET GENERAL  
FUND COST**

Staff Years

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Sources of Revenue/Other Offset for Proposed Change and Subsequent Years:

**Space-Related Impacts:** Will this proposal result in any additional space requirements?  Yes  N/A

**Support/Other Departmental Impacts:**  Yes  N/A

**Remarks:**  Yes  N/A