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Phone fee to pay for emergency radio network

County residents with landline telephones will pony up 65 cents more a month.

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By Delen Goldberg
Staff writer

Onondaga County residents will soon pay 65 cents more a month for their landline telephones to help cover the cost of a new \$34.7 million emergency radio network.

The state Legislature passed a bill this week that allows Onondaga County to impose a surcharge of up to \$1 on landline telephones.

Money collected will help pay for the county's interoperable radio system, which will allow first responders from different departments to communicate with one another.

Currently, the county's 57 fire departments, 20 emergency management agencies and 20 police departments use radios that employ different technologies and work on different frequencies. In order to communicate, they often have to use multiple radios or cell phones.

"The interoperable communications system is vital to Onondaga County," said Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli, D-Syracuse. "This system saves time and saves lives."

County government officials, police, firefighters and emergency medical technicians all support the measure, but Magnarelli was the only Assembly member from Onondaga County who voted for it.

The surcharge will apply to all landline telephones in Onondaga County, but a single customer in a single location won't be taxed on more than 75 lines. Lifeline customers, public safety agencies and municipalities also will be exempt.

County officials hope the pennies add up to millions.

"Funding assistance in any form will help Onondaga County pay for the interoperable communications system and go a long way toward reducing the amount of money the county will bond," said Charles Gabriel, project manager and grants consultant to the county's 911 system.

State and federal money also is paying for the radio project.

http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2008/06/phone_fee_to_pay_for_emergency.html