

Less land lines lead to falling revenue for county's 911 provider

By Chris Cotelesse | Posted: Wednesday, July 24, 2013 10:46 pm

The Montgomery County Emergency Communication District is planning to convert to a microwave network in 2014 while expecting a 2.8 percent decrease in revenue on top of a funding system that has not kept up with inflation.

Taxes on land lines and cell phones provide nearly all of the district's revenue stream. Since 2000, county residents have followed a nation-wide trend of disconnecting their land lines in favor of cell phones. Until 2012, cell phone sales continued to rise.

"Now that's leveling off, but people are getting rid of their land lines so that's where the decrease comes from," said Executive Director Chip VanSteenberg.

In addition to the shortfall, inflation has outpaced the taxes generated. MCECD collected \$9.11 per person in 2000. That same charge is worth \$12.08 per person in 2012 dollars, but MCECD only collected \$9.20 per person in 2012.

"Therefore, MCECD is providing 9-1-1 service for only 23.8 percent less than it collected in Fiscal Year 2000," according to MCECD's budget summary.

The revenue issues will make it more difficult to purchase a new \$600,000 microwave network that will make it easier for the agency to transfer emergency calls.

"It's not really an option. It's a requirement at this point," said Administrative Manager Jeanne Frey.

The network, planned to go online in the middle of 2014, will be able to direct calls anywhere in the world along with caller information.

When calls are transferred over the copper network, the caller's location, name, nature of emergency and other pertinent details are lost.

The new system will be most useful for calls that are received outside of the service area. The system directs calls based on the area code so the county's four public safety answering points occasionally receive emergency calls from people who have a cell phone or voice over Internet phone which is registered in another area.

"That stuff happens," she said.