



Reported by Jade Olds

## Two way radio upgrades

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A federal grant is allowing Tri-State Ambulance to make much needed upgrades to their radio system. Those upgrades will allow them to better connect with other emergency response agencies.

"When you work with twenty-six different agencies, actually, add in another sixteen mutual aid agencies, it's extremely important that we have communication with all of those," says Tom Tornstrom, Director of Operations for Tri-State Ambulance.



A nearly 105,000 dollar grant from FEMA will allow Tri-State to upgrade their current two way radio system. The upgrades would have been needed with or without a grant.

Tornstrom says, "This is coming at a very good time for us."

Tri-State's current equipment isn't compatible with modern radio systems that many states will soon be using.

"Even though we're compliant with what we need now, we're looking three to five years down the road, and it's hard to say what will be out there then," says Tornstrom.

Already Wisconsin is planning to install a comprehensive mutual aid system, but that system won't be implemented for at least another two years.

The seventeen million dollar project is part of FEMA's efforts to connect every first responder agency in the country.

"Most disasters don't care about the black lines that are drawn on maps," says Keith Butler, Emergency Management Coordinator for La Crosse County.

Which means if they want to be compatible, emergency response agencies around La Crosse will soon need to make some changes.

"If they don't have a modern radio, something that's ten or fifteen years old, got to throw that one away, replace it and by a new radio," says Butler.

That new radio won't be cheap. Agencies expect to pay around 5,000 dollars per portable radio.

Tri-State anticipates the upgrades will exceed the amount of the grant, but expects to pass their savings onto the patient.

"These federal dollars that we're receiving will help keep our healthcare cost and our patient care costs under control," says Tornstrom.

Tri-State plans to have the radio upgrades completed by the end of this year.

Other emergency response agencies in Wisconsin will have about two years to make the switch.

That's when the new radio system is expected to be up and running.



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