

Madison County Wireless 9-1-1

While wireless phones can be an important public safety tool, they also create unique challenges for public safety and emergency response personnel. Those challenges are becoming easier for first responders in Madison County, thanks to some new technology to be installed soon. Currently, cell phone users in Madison County who dial 911 could get lucky and be connected to a dispatcher in Madison County. Or, they could get passed to emergency responders in Columbus, Hilliard, Dublin, or somewhere else in Franklin, Champaign or Clark County.

“That doesn’t happen often, but when it does, it is a problem,” said Madison County Sheriff Jim Sabin. “When it does, you are talking to a communications officer from another area, unfamiliar with this area and they have to determine what jurisdiction they are dealing with.” The Sheriff said this can be especially difficult for travelers on one of Madison County’s major highways and roads. “Those travelers are often unfamiliar with where they are,” Sabin said. “So directing the proper agency to them can be problematic.”

All that will be changing soon. The county is preparing to install a new wireless 911 service that will not only direct the caller to Madison County dispatchers, but will also provide a pinpoint location for that caller. The system will show dispatchers the callers phone number. Additionally, a dot, representing the cell phone’s location, will appear on a map in front of the dispatcher.

That dispatcher will be able to use that map to access pictures of the terrain, geographic land marks and even specific houses in the area, Sabin said the technology is vitally important, given that a large number, almost half, of all 911 calls received by the county, are made from cell phones. “With land phones, we were able to identify immediately where a call was coming from by the number and mapping system,” Sabin said. “You have more and more cell phones and some people are getting away from land phones in their home. Now we have a tool that helps us locate them immediately.”



Sabin said he expects all the equipment to be installed by the end of October. Once that installation is complete, all cell phone service providers in the United States have six months to configure their towers in the area to comply with the county’s new system. Much of the system upgrade is already paid for Sabin said. The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio placed a small tariff on all monthly cell phone bills. “It is a very small tax on an individual cell phone bill, but it really adds up,” Sabin said. Madison County has received about \$125,000 from the tax since it was levied. That money will be used to offset the cost of the needed equipment upgrades for the system. There is also a monthly fee, charged to the county, for the wireless 911 technology. The tax was initially to be removed after three years, however legislators are considering making it a permanent tariff. “At this point, the burden is not that great on the individual and certainly, it enhances the services that are provided,” the sheriff said.

Sabin said he is pleased that Madison County will be one of the leaders in providing the wireless 911 capabilities to its residents. “Obviously, the traditional 911 system was designed decades ago to aid first responders in locating and assisting in emergencies,” Sabin said. “In our current age of cell phone communication, especially given the fact that we becoming increasingly more dependent on cellular communication not less, it is important that we are able to provide our first responders with as much information as possible so they are better able to help those in need.”

Current Status:

All equipment and upgrades, to receive cellular phone 9-1-1 mapping has been installed and is operational. The cellular phone providers operating in Madison County have been notified. By law, within six months the providers must begin transmitting the location data to our center, for mapping. Many companies have already been in contact with our office to establish a timetable for providing the mapping data.

We will update this release with the names of providers as they begin to provide this service.