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News Release

For Immediate Release

Fire Department Upgrades Mobile Computers

The Springfield Fire Department will upgrade mobile computer terminals in its vehicles for wireless Internet access with money saved by removing a little-used phone service at fire stations. The upgrade involves switching from a City-maintained radio network to a publicly owned cellular network. The increased capacity of the cellular network will open the door for new software tools that can aid firefighters in the field.

As part of ongoing cost-cutting measures, the Department has decided to remove the external emergency phones at each of its 12 stations. The resulting $5,400 of savings will be applied to the cost of the mobile computer upgrade. The mobile computer terminals allow dispatch information to be sent to the Fire Department vehicles, allowing firefighters to change their status without dispatcher interaction, and providing detailed maps and plans that facilitate emergency response.

The external phones were initially installed in 2006 as a way for individuals to quickly call 911 if they walked or drove to a fire station for help, and found the station locked or the crew away on another call. These phones immediately connect with a 911 dispatcher when a user picks up the receiver.

However, the phones saw minimal use and often had not been used as originally intended. They were often used to request non-emergency services, and were occasionally mistaken for regular phones. Today, many if not most citizens have access to a cell phone for emergency communications. With the removal of the phones, if a person arrives at a fire station and finds the crew away on another call, they can still contact 911 via cell phone. The next closest fire unit will then be dispatched to their location.

The Springfield Fire Department continues to hire and train personnel, as authorized by City Council during a Citywide hiring freeze on General Fund positions now in its third year. A total of 17 new firefighters graduated from two Fire Academy classes in 2010, bringing the Department back to normal staffing levels for emergency response. The next academy class is forming now.

For more information, contact: Assistant Fire Chief Randy Villines, (417) 864-1500.