

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

c/o Novato Fire Protection District
95 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945
PHONE: (415) 878-2690 FAX: (415) 878-2660

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 7, 2011
TO: MERA Executive Committee
FROM: Maureen Cassingham, Executive Officer
SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM **C-2**: PROPOSED MERA SYSTEM USER POLICY
STATEMENT FOR SYSTEM MUTUAL-AID AND
AUTOMATIC BACK-UP AID AGENCIES AND
FEE SCHEDULE

Recommended Action: As proposed by the MERA Fee Review Subcommittee, recommend approval of this report as the MERA System User Policy Statement for Mutual-Aid and Automatic Back-up Aid Agencies and Zero Rate Fee Schedule for these System Users.

Per Section 4, Non-Member Uses of the Radio System, of Article VIII, Rules and Procedures of the MERA Bylaws, “public agencies not members of the Authority may use the Authority’s radio system on a fee basis. The Executive Office shall develop a fee schedule for the use of the radio system by non-members, which shall be reviewed and approved annually by the Board as part of the annual budget approval.” Heretofore, MERA has approved non-member System use requests by mutual-aid and automatic back-up aid agencies on a case-by-case basis at no charge. The requesting agency pays for its radios and all costs associated with programming and alignment. Training is separate.

There are currently fourteen (14) non-member mutual-aid and automatic back-up aid users with a combined 136 mobile or portable radios. These MERA “partners” use of the system is critical to seamless emergency response throughout the County.

On May 18, the MERA Board requested further review of a fee schedule for the 14 non-member users by the Finance and Executive Committees. The Finance Committee reviewed this matter at their May 25, 2011 meeting, unanimously recommending a zero-rate fee schedule for non-member public agency users and consideration of a fee schedule for private users based on either the number of radios used, proportionate share of operating costs or proportionate share of operating costs and Bond payment.

The Executive Committee, after considerable discussion on September 14 regarding this matter, appointed a Subcommittee of Sheriff Doyle, Chief Pearce and City Manager Rock

to further discuss and analyze with the Executive Officer the assessment of fees. The Subcommittee met on October 18. They identified 5 of the 14 mutual aid agencies using the system as automatic back-up aid agencies. They include the Humane Society, Point Reyes National Seashore (GGNRA), AMR, Nor Cal Ambulance and St. Joe's Ambulance. Point Reyes SS, per Sheriff Doyle, provides periodic Park Ranger back-up assistance to the Sheriff's Office and County Fire in West Marin. The Humane Society, a non-profit animal control, shelter and rescue operation, likewise provides important back-up to MERA members. The three private ambulance companies provide basic life support (BLS) non-emergency medical transport back-up to Fire Service and EMS. Ambulance companies are required to obtain a Certificate of Operation from the County to operate county-wide. EMS mandates that these companies purchase a MERA radio (\pm \$3,000) for each ambulance which enables them to enter the EMS system to provide back-fill and BLS transport as requested. Fire departments and paramedics provide initial advance life support (ALS) transport but also rely on ambulance companies to back them up with ALS to the extent an emergency event requires.

Chief Pearce has confirmed, through the EMS Local Emergency Medical Services Coordinator, that the number of calls to private ambulance companies for back-up has significantly decreased over the last five years. The attached spreadsheet on "Private Ambulance Dispatches By Month, 2010 and January through August, 2011 confirms a 20.4% decrease in dispatches year-to-date through August the same period during the prior year. Percent of private dispatches to total vehicle dispatches in 2010 was 2.6%, which decreased to 1.7% January through August, 2011. With the ambulance companies' investment in MERA radios, along with diminishing calls for back-up, these operations have been hard hit financially. Therefore, MERA fees would pose an additional hardship to our ambulance partners.

Based on this further review, it was determined that the cost-benefit of a fee to mutual-aid and back-up aid providers would generate nominal revenue and potentially adversely affect the agency relationships that have served MERA and the citizens of Marin so well. In summary, the Subcommittee proposes that MERA adopt this report as a Policy Statement that acknowledges and approves system use by mutual-aid and automatic back-up agency users as critical to MERA member operations and that a zero-rate fee schedule should be approved for these agencies.

ATTACHMENT: Private Ambulance Dispatches by Month – October, 2011
(2010 and January through August 2011)