

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 6, 2004
TO: MERA Executive Committee
FROM: Martin J. Nichols, Executive Officer
SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM H: MEMBERSHIP OF NEW AGENCIES

Recommended Action: Recommend policy for admission of new MERA members.

Background:

The Ross Valley Sanitary District is interested in joining MERA. Once MERA is fully operational and the current low-band system is abandoned, other agencies may realize they are without coverage and may also ask to join.

The MERA JPA anticipated new members in Article 7:

7.1 Members.

b. The County, any Special District and any City or Town may be considered for Membership in the Authority after February 28, 1998, by presenting an adopted resolution to the Board which includes a request to become a Member of the Authority.

c. The Board shall accept proposed Members upon a majority affirmative vote of the quorum, upon payment of any Board determined fee and interest, and upon satisfaction of any conditions established by the Board as a prerequisite for Membership.

The conditions for membership would include the following financial issues:

1. Contribution to the "backbone" (the fixed 17 sites that send and receive MERA signals).
2. An annual share of the MERA operating costs.

Based on the relative size of Ross Valley Sanitary District, these costs would be about:

1. Backbone – one time payment of \$20,000 to \$25,000.
2. An annual share of the operating budget of about .2% of our \$1.4 million annual budget – about \$5,000 per year.

The new agency would also need to buy their radios at about \$3,500 each. Motorola will charge them about \$250 each to install them in their vehicles.

The principle legal issue is whether or not Sanitary District No. 1 shares the common powers to provide radio services needed to be a MERA member. Our General Counsel believes that the Appeals Court decision effectively answers this question in the affirmative. We would complete a review the state establishment statute for the district for other future members to assure ourselves that they have the requisite common powers.

The policy issues are:

1. System capacity – How many additional users can the system accommodate without degradation of service?
2. Governance – Does MERA want additional Board members who have not been a part of the construction process?
3. Public safety – How important is it for the applying agency to have access to an emergency radio system?
4. Service rather than membership. Should MERA sell service to other agencies without them joining the Board of Directors?

System Capacity

The addition of public works type agencies can be easily accommodated within MERA's designed capacity (low activity). MERA also has the ability to add channels (designed for 28 – now uses 9 channels).