

9.1.5

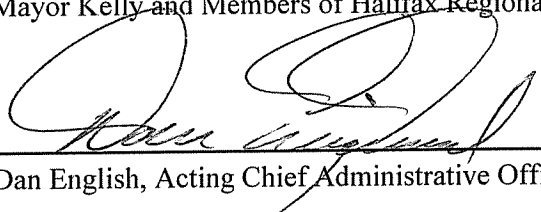


PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Halifax Regional Council
September 14, 2004

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Dan English, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: September 10, 2004

SUBJECT: Emergency Broadcast System- Memorandum of Understanding

ORIGIN

Shortly after Hurricane Juan in the Fall of 2003, the municipality's Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) was approached by InfoRadio Canada, operators of a community information radio station 97.9 FM, with a view to establishing a partnership with HRM to provide an Emergency Broadcast System (EBS) during times of public emergency or disaster.

RECOMMENDATION

- A) It is recommended that staff be authorized to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between HRM and InfoRadio Canada 97.9 FM, for use of its resources as an Emergency Broadcast System during times of public emergency and/or disaster, and, when concluded, the MOU be returned to Halifax Regional Council for approval.
- B) EMO staff be authorized to approach the Nova Scotia and Federal Governments for cost-sharing on this project, through the Federal Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP). If approved, this cost-sharing arrangement would substantially reduce HRM's direct cost outlay, as indicated in the Budget Implications section of this report.

BACKGROUND

Since amalgamation, HRM has had more than its fair share of public emergencies and/or natural disasters. These events include forest fires, train derailments, chemical spills, Swissair Flight #111 tragedy, flooding, Hurricane Juan, and the Blizzard of 2004. Communicating accurate and timely information to the public is critical in the mitigation process for any large scale public emergency event. Through the Emergency Public Information Officer, the municipality's EMO has developed an Emergency Public Information Plan, which includes protocols for the management of this information. As a part of the broadcast media, InfoRadio Canada is a service employed by HRM that will allow EMO, in times of emergency, to send a recorded voice message directly to the 97.9 FM transmitter to be broadcast immediately. This system has been successfully used in a number of past events such as Hurricane Juan and the Blizzard of 2004. In fact, InfoRadio personnel have been located in the EMO Emergency Operations Centre during some of these events and broadcasted public information notices and bulletins directly from the centre.

One of the unique advantages of the community information radio concept is that it will allow a continuous loop of HRM-generated public information warnings, or emergency bulletins, until such time as the information is updated or no longer needed.

DISCUSSION

In order to enhance and protect this service, and to allow for fail-safe access to the system, the EMO is advocating the upgrading of its current connections to the community information radio.

(1) The program content is stored in a computer at InfoRadio Canada's Geiser Hill transmitter site, which is protected by back-up battery and generator power. However, it is necessary to develop software to locate the production facility of the station (voice recording, editing and logging) at the site of the server and transmitter with access through the Internet or, as a back-up, cell phone or land-line telephone. Through both Internet and telephone systems, the user will be identified by user account and personal identification number (PIN), and then will be provided a menu of options. These options will allow for authorized users to activate the EMO program loop (replacing the normal broadcast loop) and record emergency messaging for broadcast to the public. The server at the transmitter site will be equipped with redundant processors and hard drives to make it a "fail safe" system in all respects.

(2) New software will permit access to the broadcast facility by the licensed station operators from any computer or telephone location. Again, access and functionality will be strictly password-protected.

(3) Wireless computer devices that can deliver voice messages through the Internet to the broadcast facility will be purchased for key EMO mobile computers to allow full mobile use of the system.

Events requiring emergency responses can be life-threatening. This innovative emergency communications initiative is intended to be life saving. No other media outlet can, or will, offer direct system access to the municipality's EMO during times of public emergency and/or disaster.

InfoRadio Canada, in effect, turns over its emergency broadcast system to HRM. InfoRadio has formally advised HRM, by letter, that it will undertake to file application with the Canadian Radio/Television and Telecommunications Commission and Industry Canada for approval to increase its broadcast signal output during times of public emergency and/or disaster in HRM. This will ensure emergency bulletins and updates will be broadcast to all residents of HRM throughout the far reaches of the municipality.

If approved and adopted, this initial HRM Emergency Broadcast System can serve as a model for other municipalities throughout Canada.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The project will require some software and hardware upgrades and “hardening” to the agency’s main server; upgrades to remote notebook PCs to allow for extra redundancy; as well as the purchase of wireless air cards to provide remote access to the server. Estimated total costs are approximately \$68,000. However, staff will confirm final cost specifications. Although there are no specific funds committed in the current budget for this expenditure, EMO staff will be approaching the Federal and Provincial Governments for cost-sharing through the Federal Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP). If approved, this cost-sharing arrangement would substantially reduce HRM’s direct cost outlay. HRM’s net costs are not expected to exceed \$34,000. These costs will be accommodated within existing business unit envelopes.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the municipality’s Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve Budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES

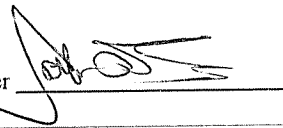
To continue with present practices.

ATTACHMENTS

Fax from Information Radio dated September 10, 2004, confirming its intention to approach the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission and Industry Canada for approval to increase its broadcast signal, if required, during times of public emergency or disaster.

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Barry Manuel, Coordinator, EMO
John O’Brien, Corporate Communications Officer



Information Radio

Date: September 10, 2004

To: John O'Brien

From: Jack McGaw

Fax: 902 832 5586

Phone: 902 423 5585

RE: EBS COMMUNICATIONS REACH IN HALIFAX REGION

John,

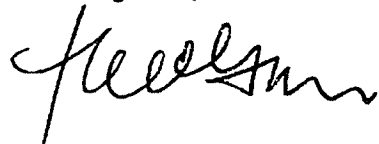
Further to our offer to place our station in the hands of EMO personnel during a local emergency, we are prepared to address the issue of increased power prior to reaching an agreement with the Municipality.

While a power increase is not needed to sustain the information service we have created here, we are prepared to apply to the CRTC and Industry Canada for permission to increase our power output even if it requires a change in the FM frequency from 97.9. We understand that HRM cannot contribute financially to the improvement of a signal that may hold some commercial benefit for a private radio enterprise, so the cost of the applications and equipment upgrades will be borne by us.

Until we were immersed in the emergency response to Hurricane Juan, we hadn't realized how useful our unique broadcast model would be for an Emergency Broadcast System.

We are pleased to be considered for this important role.

Best regards,



Jack McGaw