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To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL" <CCDTMACDL@vancouver.ca>
CC: "City Manager's Correspondence Group - DL" <CMCG@vancouver.ca>
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Subject: E-comm dispatch

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

I am writing to provide an update on the replacement of the E-Comm radio system that serves VPD, VFRS, BC Ambulance and other emergency services across the Lower Mainland.

The original system, which was first deployed in 1999, has reached the end of its service life. The replacement technology was selected by the Lower Mainland emergency services community – police, fire and ambulance – following rigorous analysis and testing. As our service provider, E-Comm supported the selection and in 2014, began planning for the massive technical and operational undertaking of developing and implementing a new best-in-class radio network design.

Lower Mainland emergency services starting transitioning to the new radio system on an agency-by-agency basis in 2017 and that process will conclude this month. VFRS switched over the new system on February 27, 2018 as one of the final agencies to do so.

Based on "Project 25" digital technology in the 700 MHz band, "P25," is state-of-the art technology and is an open standard adopted widely by emergency services across North America. Using this new technology, E-Comm's new system is delivering clearer audio, better coverage and greater security features for emergency services. It will also enhance the safety of first responders and the public through increased use of shared channels, allowing for better communication in emergencies.

Of note, communication encryption is an element of the P25 technology and has been incorporated into the E-Comm system design. As a result, individuals using scanners will no longer be able to hear radio transmissions broadcast over the E-Comm network. While VPD has been using encrypted radio for some time, the implementation of encryption last week represents a change for VFRS.

The operational rationale for encryption includes interception of emergency service communication by criminals and protection of personal privacy, including personal medical information and details regarding private premises. Specifically in relation to privacy, E-Comm and the agencies that use the E-Comm radio system are obligated to protect personal information broadcast by emergency service personnel in the course of their duties; those obligations supersede any claim for unrestricted public access to such information.

One media outlet has picked up on this issue and has recently published a story asserting that their inability to listen to emergency services communication will slow the dissemination of news regarding major events in the Lower Mainland and create a risk to public safety. While there is a compelling operational rationale for the use of encrypted radio by fire services, VFRS has acknowledged the value of notification of significant events and is using social media to provide timely communication to the media and the general public. VFRS is also exploring other technological solutions to enhance this communication.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Darrell Reid at [604.665.6051](tel:604.665.6051).

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