

MEDIA/ PUBLIC SAFETY CO-OP MINUTES

NOV. 20, 2003

Members Present -

Shelly Alley	Roanoke Police
Lindsey Nair	Roanoke Times
George McMillan	Roanoke Sheriff's Office
Melissa Preas	WLSL-10
Tom Foster	VSP
Teresa Hamilton Hall	Roanoke County
Mike Stater	Virginia Department of Health
Ray Clark	Salem Police Dept
Reg Gray	Salem PD
Rick Moorer	Virginia Department of Health
Shane Mooreland	WLSL-10
Jimmy Brubaker	Roanoke Sheriff's Office
Jennifer Faulkner	Roanoke Fire-EMS
Erin Barnhart	Roanoke Sheriff's Office
John O'Shea	Roanoke City Health Dept
Chuck Mason	Roanoke County PD
Meg Hibbert	Salem Times Register
Katheryn Huff	Salem Times Register

The Media/Public Safety Co-op meeting of November 20, 2003 was hosted by the Roanoke City Sheriff's Office and was held in the jury assembly room at the Roanoke City courthouse. After the meeting opener, Sheriff George McMillan presented the program on improved courthouse security in the wake of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001: After 9/11, the courthouse received six bomb threats, some of which lead to evacuations. At that time, security equipment was located on the upper floors of the courthouse, "so the rest of the courthouse was wide open," McMillan said. Talk of getting cameras had been going on for about 6 months prior to that. Fear among employees created pressure to improve security, and that pressure helped get secure funding for more security equipment. Now, they can see what goes on outside the courtrooms and in the perimeter around the courthouse. It actually reduced the actual amount of equipment needed because the stuff that was on the upper floors was consolidated into the equipment that was placed on the first floor, just inside the front doors. All but two entrances into the courthouse were locked. After a small delay initially as everyone got used to the new procedure and a few complaints, things flow a lot quicker now, McMillan said. There has not been a bomb threat since the changes. Now, everyone except known law enforcement officers are screened before entering the courthouse. Everyone feels safer. Prior to the changes, 103,500 people were screened in a 6-month time period. Now, 220,000 are screened. At first, guns, knives and other contraband filled 2 trash cans at the security checkpoint. If people want to keep their contraband (like a pocket knife), they have to go back to their car and put it there. All locks at the courthouse were also changed because many people were coming in late at night to do work. The lock change has made it easier to keep track of who comes in and out of the building, and fewer court days are going late into the evening. In addition to court security, McMillan discussed his weekender program and fees he has implemented or plans to implement to raise more money from inmates.

-Health Department officials reported that last month's Bioterrorism Drill went very well and they learned a lot from the exercise. More than 400 "patients" were processed and media coverage was good. They said they were grateful to the media and Salem officials who let them use their facility.

-Sgt. Tom Foster with the Virginia State Police has been doing a good job of getting used to the pager. Most everyone at the table agreed that it would be difficult to use the paging system TOO MUCH. On the contrary, some departments might benefit from using it a bit more. For example, someone said the Roanoke Regional Airport could have used the pager for fog delay information.

- Teresa Hall was officially introduced as Roanoke County's new public information officer. Teresa will handle many significant public safety incidents. For all others, Lt. Chuck Mason and Capt. Phil Patrone are still the go-to men for the police department and Jennifer Conley-Sexton will still handle fire news. Teresa said she needs paging information and Foster said he'd like a list of who is involved in the co-op.

-HIPAA remains a headache for some people attempting to get information from public safety departments AND for some law enforcement officers trying to get information on a patient. We agreed that it remains a case of each situation being different and everyone remaining cautious about the law. I encourage everyone to do some internet research on the legislation and try to work together when you run across a road block. -The topic of Amber Alerts was broached in reference to a recent case in the New River Valley. Foster said he is not always aware of the details in Amber Alert cases that occur in other areas of the state outside his region.

- Foster suggested that we meet next time at the smart road center at Virginia Tech. He is going to check on that and we will get back to the members.
Have a safe holiday season, Lindsey Nair and Shelly Alley