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Sheriff calls for radio upgrades

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Monmouth County Sheriff Kim Guadagno wants municipalities to become part of the plans for a \$21 million upgrade to the county radio system to provide more reliable lines of communication between county and local emergency responders.

Guadagno said the county improvements are planned in response to a Federal Communications Commission mandate that all nonfederal public safety licensees begin using narrowband channels by Jan. 1, 2013. In addition, the manufacture and importation of any equipment using wideband channels will not be permitted after Jan. 1, 2011, according to the U.S. Department of Justice Web site.

The county, one of four Homeland Security Regions for communications interoperability planning in the state, expects to go to narrowband channels by 2011, Guadagno said.

"Our television sets are not going to work after 2009 without some upgrades — the radio system the county employs won't work after 2011, and certainly you won't be able to get any parts after 2013," Guadagno said. "You have to go to digital with the television sets; we're going to narrowbanding for the airwaves."

The sheriff has been talking with municipal officials about the deadlines and is encouraging towns to share in the purchase of equipment that may help reduce costs for the major undertaking. She said the county plans to hire a consultant in the next few weeks to guide the process.

"One of the biggest problems with (the terrorist attacks of 9/11) is the firefighters could not communicate with the police department when they went in the building. People died in the World Trade Center as the result of problems communicating between emergency personnel," Guadagno said.

"This will guarantee interoperability among all the communities in the county, so our police departments can communicate, and so any public safety entity can communicate with each other anywhere at any time," she said.

Police in Manalapan, where Guadagno visited a Township Committee meeting two weeks ago, said they already are planning a roughly \$500,000 to \$1 million radio system upgrade. Police Chief Stuart Brown said the township expects the new system would be "digital ready," or adaptable to the county system.

"We don't have time to wait for the county to move forward with their system because ours is more than

25 years old," Brown said. "We're really running out of time so we're going to have to look at something that is going to cover both our bases, to suit our immediate needs and, if we did choose to go into a county system, we may look into something more compatible between the two."

Guadagno said municipalities she's visited have been receptive to the plan though they have reservations, particularly about cost. She said communications upgrades for all the county's municipalities has been estimated at about \$15 million total.

Guadagno said she plans to continue to visit "as many towns as will have me" to discuss the pending deadlines. She said she's visited about six towns so far.

"It's a work in progress . . . this is just opening up the discussion and getting people talking about the need to plan," Guadagno said.
