

Washington Parish Communications District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Better Communications – A Foundation For the Future

Soon after Hurricane Katrina, Washington Parish emergency management officials, first responders, and the public realized that which military commanders know only too well, “Without adequate communications, all else fails”.

Indeed, having no other way to call for help after the storm, Parish President Taylor wrote an SOS on a single piece of paper and handed it to some National Guard soldiers from the local armory, who then picked their way over to the capital of Baton Rouge, a 100-mile trip that took many hours to accomplish.

"We were adrift, because we had no communications," said the local Homeland Security Director Tommy Thiebaud.

In the six months since the storm, emergency officials have been working hard to design a parish wide solution to the challenge of being able to communicate with state and federal officials in Baton Rouge, emergency responders throughout the parish, and with those citizens in need of help.

The parish's emergency communications plan was unveiled at the LOUISIANA SPEAKS open house which was held at the Bogalusa YWCA this past Saturday.

The plan calls for the modernizing and replacement of all first responder radios and the construction of a “hardened” emergency management facility, equipped to allow communications to all areas of the parish, to Baton Rouge, and with the public.

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Jim Coleman, the Chairman of the Washington Parish Communications District, says, "When all else fails, this proposed system will continue to be operational. It will help facilitate a quicker response to the needs of the community for food, water, fuel, law enforcement, fire protection and medical help".

"Included will be public broadcast capabilities, internet and telephone services to the outside world. Amateur (ham radio) messaging to anyone in the country will be made available to our citizens".

"Anyone interested in becoming a ham radio operator to assist in this effort should immediately contact the Franklinton Fire Department for information"

When asked when the system will be constructed, Mr. Coleman went on to say, "The needs of all parishes will first be sent to the Louisiana Recovery Authority which will recommend to Governor Blanco which projects are worthy of financial support. I hope that the many needs of Washington Parish will be met."

"The time is right for us to improve our emergency communications system to the level currently being utilized by our neighboring parishes. Our citizens and emergency responders deserve no less".

The entire proposal has been placed on the Washington Parish Communications web site www.wpcde-911.com under the heading "Washington Parish Communications Proposal".