

# **Bond Case Briefs**

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## **Dane County, Wis. Hopes Pre-Alerts Will Cut 911 Response Times.**

**The 911 center board unanimously approved a 90-day pilot program that would add pre-alerting for additional types of emergencies.**

Amid continuing concerns about dispatch times, the Dane County 911 center will soon start having dispatchers alert responders more quickly for more types of serious emergencies.

The 911 center board on Wednesday unanimously approved a 90-day pilot program for so-called “pre-alerting” that would begin May 5.

Currently, the 911 center sends fire, EMS or police personnel quickly after obtaining location, name, phone number and nature of a problem for only a handful of emergencies. After that rapid dispatch, call takers continue to get further information. For other calls, 911 center staff ask more questions before dispatching personnel so the right resources are sent.

The current rapid-dispatch emergencies are a person on fire, trapped in a sinking vehicle, choking or not breathing; a vehicle in flood water or with accelerator stuck and unable to stop; or an active assailant. With the new pre-alerting, a rapid-fire dispatch would also be made for structure, outdoor or vehicle fires, and “significant” rescues.

The move comes six weeks after County Executive Joe Parisi announced pre-alerting should begin for Madison and other interested jurisdictions on March 31. The board, however, on March 19, indefinitely delayed Parisi’s bid over concerns by Madison fire and police officials and others about the method of pre-alerting Parisi sought and his failure to consult with responders before announcing the move.

Amid the delay, a subcommittee that had already been studying pre-alerting made recommendations that were then approved by the broader Operating Practices Committee and forwarded to the full, Madison-dominated board for a decision, which was unanimous and without discussion.

“The practice of pre-alerting had the chance to be vetted by the right committees,” Madison Fire Chief Steven Davis said later.

Madison police support the move for the same reason, and will monitor the pilot to see if more types of calls, such as a robbery in progress, would be appropriate for pre-alerting, Lt. Carl Strasburg said.

John Dejung, 911 center director, said that pre-alerting makes sense for the new fire emergencies included and that the system isn’t much different than the one Parisi promoted in early March. The main difference is that vehicle accidents with apparent injuries were not included, he said.

Maple Bluff Fire Chief Josh Ripp, who led the meeting because Chairman Paul Skidmore was absent, said he expects scrutiny of the pilot to detect unintended consequences.

Parisi is glad to see the board, the only governing body that currently has authority to make changes to the 911 center, is moving forward on pre-alert, spokeswoman Casey Becker said later. The county executive believes it's important to continue to take a look at the board's governance structure and determine which model best serves an agency, which works for 85 departments every day.

The board's decision Wednesday is the latest development in a recent spat between Madison, the county and others over dispatch times. The dispute has been over technology and protocols, not the work of call takers or dispatchers.

Also at the meeting, recently retired dispatcher Debra Julian read a prepared statement voicing a lack of confidence in Dejung on staffing, training and other matters, and urged the board to recommend replacing him when his contract expires in June. The board did not ask Gillian any questions, and Dejung later declined comment on her statement.

The board also heard more concerns about a new computer-aided dispatch, CAD, system launched a year ago and continuing problems and fixes.

"It's better than it was," Dejung said. "We still have a long way to go."

BY DEAN MOSIMAN, MCCLATCHY NEWS SERVICE / APRIL 17, 2014

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