

Press Democrat - Officials push for radio support

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## **OFFICIALS PUSH FOR RADIO SUPPORT**

### **FIRE CHIEF, CITY HALL WANT ALTERNATIVE TO SR HOSPITAL FOR CONTACT IN EMERGENCIES**

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Petaluma Fire Chief Chris Albertson remembers a time last year when paramedics responding to a multicar crash on Highway 101 made a radio call for hospital help and got put on hold. He said they circumvented the bottleneck at Santa Rosa Memorial -- the county's trauma center and only base station -- by using cell phones to reach medical staff at nearby Petaluma Valley Hospital.

The experience made Albertson wary of relying on the busy hospital in Santa Rosa as the go-to for emergency communications.

Now, he and others at Petaluma City Hall are urging St. Joseph's Health System, which runs both hospitals, to make Petaluma Valley a point of radio contact for south county medics dealing with the most serious cases.

"It's like anything in emergency services," Albertson said. "You might not use it today. You might not use it tomorrow. But when you do need it, you need it now."

But the move, which would use communication equipment already in place at the hospital, is being resisted by St. Joseph's as too expensive and redundant.

Michael Glasberg, the chief operating officer and acting administrative head of Petaluma Valley Hospital, said the cost of training doctors and nurses to provide additional medical oversight to paramedics in the field would be substantial.

Glasberg said Petaluma paramedics rarely need to call a facility like Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital, the county trauma center, which issues orders for treatment and transport for certain types of emergencies.

"We don't see a need to duplicate services already providing quality care," he said.

A study of the regional emergency management system found that based on new policy, Petaluma Fire would have had no need to call a base station for any of its approximately 3,800 calls in 2006, said Bryan Cleaver, head of the Coastal Valley EMS Agency.

Petaluma officials questioned the study and compared creating a second base station at the local hospital to carrying insurance.

Petaluma City Councilman Mike O'Brien said the entire south county is being forced to rely on an overloaded communication system that has failed paramedics before.

Any extra cost, O'Brien said, would be insignificant compared with Petaluma Valley's \$70 million budget.

The city has sent a letter to St. Joseph's calling for the upgrade and is trying to meet with hospital officials to reach an agreement, O'Brien said.

"It is not going away," O'Brien said. "There is no way this is going to end."

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