

New software allows county, city to share info

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NORWICH – The Emergency Operations Center in Norwich is testing new software that would allow the department to better share information with other agencies.

Previously, the center was unable to share information with other agencies during a disaster or emergency. Through a collaborative effort between the City of Norwich and Chenango County, the Emergency Operations Center obtained grants for the costly webbased software program.

“The software is something we’ve been looking at for months,” Emergency Management Officer A. Wesley Jones said. He explained that after the company changed hands recently, the program was redesigned and a new version was released just two weeks ago.

“The county signed up for a referral software purchase. We provide feedback and ideas, and it saves us thousands,” he said. The software funded the purchase through a state engineering management grant, which is performance based. According to the emergency management officer, so far the software has met and exceeded his expectations.

“The county purchased the software because we’ve been looking at ways to streamline and run operations better,” said County Emergency Management Deputy Director Matt Beckwith. “During a disaster, so many identities get involved, and it’s hard to assign tasks.” Beckwith explained that often notes are compiled in manilla folders and eventually put into a binder. After the disaster, representatives from New York and the Federal Emergency Management Agency want to look at damage assessments, and there is no real way to keep track, Beckwith explained.

The new software, produced by the Black Coral company, is an incident management software that allows different agencies to log in to the Internet based program from anywhere and track the incidents.

“During the June flood we had people in Bainbridge and Afton trying to provide us with updates,” Beckwith said, explaining that with the new software, those people would be able to log into the system, enter updates and request resources. The information would automatically pop up at the EOC.

The software is also able to store images and plot coordinates on maps, providing a complete informational source for FEMA and state representatives. The information can be kept on file forever, so if subsequent disasters cause further damage to an area, information on each incident can be pulled up.

Because the program is web-based, Jones recently told the members of the City of Norwich Public Safety and Public Works Committee that he will be exploring options for a dual Internet system. “There were two incidents where cable and DSL were down at the same time,” Jones explained. He said he has investigated options for a back-up Internet system, including a satellite connection, however no decision has been made. The software does contain a component for working off-line in the case of an Internet disturbance.

Jones explained the software will help agencies be involved in an emergency situation without actually being at the EOC. “The emergency operations center looks big, but when you get all those people up there when there is an emergency, it gets crowded fast. The software will allow individuals to be involved in an incidence without actually being there,” Jones said. Beckwith explained that laptops could be sent out in the field and utilized with the command trailer the organization already uses for speedy updates to the system.

The Emergency Operations Center, located in the City of Norwich Police Department, is operated collaboratively by the city and the county.

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