

Garrett seeks more funds for emergency services

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OAKLAND - Getting more funding for emergency services is a concern for Garrett County Emergency Management, according to Brad Frantz, director.

Frantz presented a departmental update at Tuesday's county commission meeting, discussing the drop in homeland security funding.

"The baseline allocation was \$130,000 for all counties," Frantz said, explaining that was the bare minimum any county could receive. "Garrett County's total allocation was \$134,000. Everybody got at least twice what we did."

Frantz said part of the reason for the county's lack of funding is the inclusion of Baltimore City, Annapolis and Ocean City, rather than dividing the money allocated to the state among the 23 counties. Frantz said although Ocean City receives special consideration for the influx of people and visitors to the area during the summer months, the same criteria is not applied to Garrett County.

"Obviously our population is more than what shows up on our census at any given time, most of the year, especially in the summer," Frantz said. "Our census doesn't really reflect what the population is any given day. I feel the same formula needs applied that is applied to Ocean City, obviously not at the same level."

Another part of the reason for the lower funding, Frantz said, is that Garrett has a lower risk factor compared to other areas in Maryland, though he feels that more funding is necessary than just above the baseline amount.

Aside from the increase in traffic that the county gets from the vacation seasons, Ernie Gregg, commission chairman, pointed out that the county could have to accommodate large numbers in other situations as well.

"In every planning discussion we've had, it's a given that in the event of a serious disaster, the exodus will be to Western Maryland," Gregg said.

Frantz said that at the state level, because that decision is not made as an official evacuation route for the state, that isn't part of the consideration in dispersing funds.

Asking the commissioners to discuss this with representatives at the state level, Frantz pointed out the need for interoperability and communication among different agencies and departments within the emergency services in the county. He said that with Washington and Allegany counties having received funding for interoperability, there were hopes that Garrett would be next in line.

Also at the meeting, David Insley, a Mountain Lake Park resident, presented research he'd gathered from various sources concerning the use of fluoride in the water. One study, he claimed, showed that fluoride could be hazardous to infants. Gregg said the commission would have that claim looked into, and if there was such a risk to infants, a warning might be placed on the county Web site to inform the public.

Wayne's Water 'n' Wells, Inc. was awarded a \$65,264 contract for the test well drilling project as part of the McHenry water project that has been funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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