



NEWS RELEASE

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SPECIALLY EQUIPPED VEHICLES TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND RESPONSE CAPABILITIES DURING MAJOR EMERGENCIES IN OHIO

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Public Safety today presented a vehicle equipped with the latest in communication and crime-fighting technology to the Mercer County Sheriff's Office. First responders and law enforcement officials, throughout a seven-county region in west-central Ohio, will use this vehicle in the event of a major weather disaster, terrorist attack, hostage or hazmat situation and any other type of large-scale emergency. Counties within this region include Auglaize, Darke, Logan, Mercer, Paulding, Shelby and Van Wert.

This vehicle, the ninth of 11 vehicles stationed at strategic locations across Ohio, was paid for by federal homeland security funding. Currently, first responders from different agencies have a hard time communicating with each other during emergencies because departments are on separate radio systems.

“The specially-equipped vehicles will vastly improve the ability of police, fire and other first responders to communicate during a large-scale emergency,” said Ken Morckel, Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety. “We will be able to provide immediate assistance and support to our first responders during those first critical hours of a major incident. The Ohio Department of Public Safety is proud to be partnering with the Buckeye State Sheriffs’ Association in this effort that will greatly benefit first responders, law enforcement and ultimately the citizens of Ohio.”

Other counties scheduled to receive BSSA vehicle units are: Guernsey County – Unit # 10 on August 30 and Franklin County will receive Unit # 11 in January 2007. Ashland County received Unit # 7 on June 23 and Lucas County received Unit #8 on July 14. Ross, Geauga, Hancock, Columbiana, Montgomery and Athens counties received BSSA vehicles throughout 2005.

The vehicles have communication gear compatible with all radio frequencies, cellular and land phones, weather monitoring equipment and Internet access. Officials will be able to tape and store video feeds from TV cameras on the roof. The vehicles have space for a crime lab and have the ability to send fingerprint and other evidence via the Internet to national crime computers and police agencies. They also have diesel generators for emergency power.

The Ohio Emergency Management Agency, a division of the Ohio Department of Public Safety and the Buckeye State Sheriffs’ Association are managing the program involving the communication vehicles. This program, along with a data-sharing program being led by the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police, comprises the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program.

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