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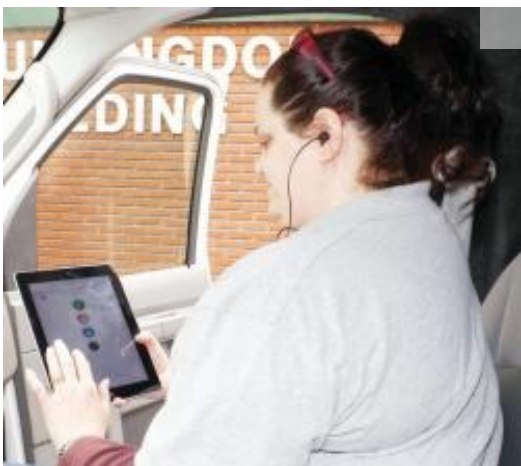
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Availability system grows

Program may expand to feature QRS and fire companies

By JEFF GILL

Daily News Staff Writer



**Huntingdon Ambulance Service EMT
Melissa Watkins places a Huntingdon
Ambulance in service with an iPad using**

A few short months after implementing the ambulance availability program for ambulance services in [Huntingdon County](#), 911 dispatcher Joe Thompson and self-employed software developer Bill Corbin are looking to add to the program.

The pair will meet with emergency medical services personnel from across the county at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 31, to discuss the new implementation of Quick Response Services (QRS) to the program.

“This all started a year ago when the first set of state regulations were being drafted and proposed to set a responsibility program for ambulance services to report their availability to the dispatch center with which they are affiliated,” Thompson told *The Daily News*. “Bill began discussing the

Where's the story?



the new online 911 availability program for emergency services. Photo by JEFF GILL

opportunity for new technology to make that program available. The main focus was on the

1 Points Mentioned

volunteer services, such as those in [Huntingdon County](#). Out of that came the EMS/ambulance availability system we started last fall. We had five ambulance services originally try it, which was strictly voluntary. They would report from the field and their feedback and participation was great.”

During a meeting in January, all of the ambulance services in the county agreed to be part of availability program.

Now, Thompson and Corbin are proposing an addition to the program to have QRS units from across the county begin voluntarily experimenting with the procedure of reporting their availability status to the Huntingdon County 911 Center.

Thompson explained that if a QRS unit’s status shows they do not have enough for a crew and there is a CPR emergency or a cardiac emergency, then the fire company affiliated with that QRS unit will be paged with available firefighters.

Southern Alleghenies Emergency Services Council executive director Carl Moen further outlined the process.

“Cardiac emergencies are time driven and there are risks to the heart and brain,” Moen said. “If a QRS unit does not have a first responder or an EMT available for the call, firefighters can respond and begin CPR. Since CPR is now hands-only, firefighters can begin the process until ambulance personnel arrive on the scene. It basically allows counties to have an “all call” when it comes to cardiac arrest emergencies.”

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Neither man saw their program growing the way it has.

“There was a lot of interest from the start,” Corbin said. “I visited different services out in the field and I thought I would only get a couple of people to show up, but there were people who showed up and I got emails from people out in the field asking me questions or giving me comments about how nice the program was working. That impressed me.”

He said once word spread that the EMS program was working, it sparked conversations from the fire companies

Corbin said he and Thompson approached the Huntingdon County Fire Chief’s Association about using the program and

they group liked what they heard.



While the availability program continues to grow within [Huntingdon County](#), it could be something other counties could be looking at in the future. According to Moen, the Emergency Services Availability Act 37 is currently looking at creating a statewide EMS plan that shows emergency services have someone on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

“It’s difficult in rural communities to have emergency services on call all the time,” Moen said. “What this does is allow the county to use all of its resources in providing the patient the quickest care. If an emergency service is not available, the next closest service would then be dispatched.”

A presentation on the new program and how it works will be open to local, county and state officials only at the Huntingdon County 911 Dispatch Center at 1 p.m. Tuesday, March 31. Then, from 2-6 p.m. that same day, an open demonstration will be offered only to emergency services personnel, EMS, fire and rescue, police and emergency management and anyone involved in emergency services who would like to see and try out the system.

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