

**Portal Rescue Board Meeting
November 19, 2008**

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at **6:01**
2. **Adoption of Agenda:** The meeting agenda was adopted without changes.

SECRETARY'S NOTE: BECAUSE OF THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF THIS MEETING, WE DISPENSE WITH THE BULLET POINT SYSTEM FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MINUTES.

Reports

Presidents Report: Special Presentation on Portal Rescue Dispatch — Loni Webster & Walter Schoepfle:

Shut-down of Current PR Dispatch System: Loni Webster read a statement from the Portal Store Dispatch Team (of which she is a member) explaining that the owners of the Portal Store regrettably could no longer provide 24/7 volunteer dispatch services. The Websters felt it was no longer possible for them to absorb the financial impact and emotional strain of this volunteer service. They plan to end the service in 30 days. Webster added that the Portal Store had explored options to sustain dispatch at store, but found no assistance available from the county, state, etc. She said they would work with new dispatchers to smooth the transition to another system.

Dispatch Process: Assistant Fire Chief W.S. reviewed how emergency calls are currently handled by dispatch at the Portal Store, including – as necessary – contacting EMTs and firefighters, providing directions to the scene, ordering helicopters, communicating with Douglas EMS, and communicating with other firefighting agencies. In short, he said, the dispatchers at the Portal Store have carried a lot of responsibility, and have done their job for five years without making any mistakes leading to mortalities, delays in treatment, loss of limb, or other major problem.

Portal Rescue firefighters and EMTs have been looking into various options for handling PR dispatch. Schoepfle pointed out that, if PR no longer uses volunteer dispatchers, 911 calls for medical emergencies will be routed to Douglas. However, Douglas dispatchers would be required to put Portal calls in the queue with those from the rest of its service area – i.e., it cannot respond to Portal calls first simply because we are an hour away. So this approach will result in delays to medical care for Portal residents. Schoepfle also discussed some of the dispatch/communication systems other emergency service organizations in the area are using. Most of them wouldn't work in Portal because of a) the distances involved (especially the distance many PR members live from the station), b) the effects of the mountain range on wireless communications; c) liability issues; and d) costs that would be prohibitive unless Portal becomes a fire district.

Possibilities for New Dispatch System: As PR members research solutions to the dispatch problem, they are focusing on two things: a radio-based system and a telephone (land-line)-based system. With the former, callers would use 911, which goes to dispatch in Bisbee, then Bisbee would send a tone to all PR radios. A member of the PR team would have to call dispatch to obtain details and confirm response. Essentially, said Schoepfle, PR members would be "auto-dispatching" themselves. However, he said, the radio-based system won't suffice when the USFS or BLM wants to communicate with us regarding a fire, because they can't call 911, an emergency-only line. While in discussion with Cochise County about a radio-based system, PR members are also looking into a phone-based system as a temporary solution, to ensure that in 30 days service won't be interrupted. Schoepfle suggested that a radio-based system is probably better in the long run, since a phone-based system would require someone to sit by the phone 24/7. The radio system will cost more, as PR would likely need better radios and perhaps an additional radio tower. The radio-based system – predicated on calls to 911 in Bisbee – may also make it difficult for Portal EMTs to serve New Mexico residents, as their 911 calls will go to Lordsburg. "Unfortunately 911 in NM will not communicate with 911 in Bisbee. Interstate communication between 911 systems does not happen." Schoepfle concluded that, "as we work through this we're going to try to avoid surprising you at 30 days – saying [at the last minute], 'this is what you got.'"

Audience Questions and Comments: The Board entertained questions and comments from the audience. The discussion covered a number of topics, including: the cost of a radio-based system; problems with cell phone-based or satellite-based communications; creating a "bomb proof" – i.e., foolproof dispatch system; privacy concerns; standards and liability issues for dispatchers; and becoming a fire district. The Board and audience also applauded the Portal Store owners for their five years of service.

Community Preparation: EMT Chief Jeff Gee proposed that, for the short-term at least, callers with an emergency should call 911, not 558-2222. For now, he said, Bisbee dispatch will call the dispatchers on the 2222 line; but eventually PR will have to stop using 2222. Gee emphasized that callers – even though upset – provide the best information possible to the 911 dispatcher. He also asked community members to make sure their 911 locator address – the green, four-digit sign provided by the county – shows up well and that their road signs are up and visible.

Treasurer’s Report – Shela DeLong and Maya Decker:

Revenues: Donation and fundraiser revenues for this year were actually higher than last year. Maya: Previous years we averaged about \$10-12K a year; this year we got \$13,640. The \$22K on the budget was just to try to balance the budget, a ridiculous figure. But we did very well. We had really good responses from community. Fire income \$21,690. Maya need to correct something said earlier – that the fire pay was \$8,000 plus – that came out of that total of \$21,000.

Expenses: DeLong reported that all the funds withdrawn from PR’s “rainy day fund” earlier in the year to cover a large truck repair bill have now been replaced.

New Business – Maya Decker:

Decker reported that Vice President Beno is working on a new Excel program for budget management. She asked board members to review budget documents she has emailed them to prepare for developing the 2009 budget in January. Decker noted that the board needed to “anticipate in 2009 ... a serious drop in donations as we deal with difficult economic times.”

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at **7:41**