



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2018.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: York County

Program Title: Improving Emergency Incident Response Collaboration and Coordination During Interstate-64 Construction

Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Stephen P. Kopczynski

Title: Fire Chief

Department: Fire & Life Safety

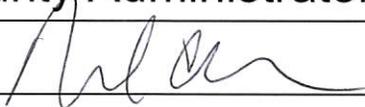
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Neil A. Morgan

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

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Program Title: Improving Emergency Incident Response Collaboration and Coordination During Interstate-64 Construction

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

Program Overview:

In 2016, the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety identified the need to partner with many other agencies that provide emergency responses in the area of the widening project of Interstate 64 (I-64). This interstate widening project brought an escalated risk and need for action in order to ensure the safety of first responders. Changing traffic patterns, combined with limited access points due to a severe limitation of areas for traffic to pull out of the way for emergency vehicles, increased risk to units responding to I-64 incidents. The first segment (Segment I) started in the City of Newport News and would extend to the 248 mile marker (MM). The York County Department of Fire and Life Safety, along with the James City County Fire Department, would be responsible for the emergency responses in the second segment (Segment II), beginning at MM 248 and extending to MM 241.3. The jurisdictional boundaries of both York County and James City County exist in Segment II. After conversations with the Newport News Fire Department we were able to identify the lessons learned from their response to I-64 during Segment I, and it was determined that a collaborative approach would be needed to accomplish the next two phases of construction involving many different agencies. Radio communications seemed to be the

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biggest hurdle that the City of Newport News faced along with access to the emergency scene. Unlike Segment II (our area), Newport News (Segment I) only had one fire/EMS agency responding to many of the incidents which caused less confusion during their responses. Within the Segment II work zone, there are typically at least two different departments and/or fire stations responding to the same incident and potentially operating on different radio channels.

1. The Problem or Need for the Program:

Responders often deal with four main issues when responding to an emergency on the Interstate. The first issue is determining the correct location and responding to the incident within a reasonable time. Currently, the response on I-64 requires a “dual” response. A dual response is when an engine and medic unit responds from different directions to the same location in an attempt to get around traffic and other obstacles in the fastest manner possible for the best outcome of the situation. Another reason for the dual response is because often persons involved or witnesses that call in to the Emergency Communications Center (ECC)/9-1-1Center’s are often not familiar with the area and/or not sure of their exact location. Responding from two different locations and from different directions allows responders to cover more area in an attempt to locate the incident in a timely manner. The second issue is effective radio communications among first/initial responders that are responding or enroute to the emergency. As with

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many emergency responses, effective communications are paramount. Without it, information is often lost or delayed during communications between units or from one ECC/9-1-1center to another, causing longer delays in emergency response. Third, there was a need for as much situational awareness of the incident as possible. And finally (four), throughout the progress of construction, it was imperative that all parties (construction contractor, law enforcement (VSP), VDOT (SSP and IMC), tow operators, as well as fire and rescue agencies, be kept fully informed of the ever changing dynamics which are part of a significant highway/interstate construction project.

The work zone is staffed by a Virginia State Police Trooper from 6 am to 6 pm each day and during some periods additional hours are covered. While this allows for a first responder to be in the area quickly, critical information relating to best routes of access, patient information, and other pertinent information cannot be passed along without direct communications among all responding agencies/units. Direct communication ability among all responders would not only reduce the response time, but would also reduce the need to unnecessarily commit units to the interstate and would also assist in identifying the exact location of the emergency. Further, it would provide a much better level of effective response coordination ensuring a higher degree of safety among responders, work zone workers and the traveling public. Additionally, having the ability to remotely visualize (such as through highway camera systems) the incident just prior to

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responding or having other responders (that were not responding) share that information with the response units provides an enormous situational awareness capability.

2. Program Development:

The York County Department of Fire and Life Safety, James City County Fire Department, Virginia State Police (VSP), Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Safety Service Patrol (SSP) and the VDOT Incident Management Coordinator's (IMC) all have specific levels of authority but are ultimately jointly responsible to respond to all emergencies safely and to mitigate emergencies/ incidents in a timely manner. The purpose of this program was to ensure an effective coordination effort and provide the necessary equipment and communications requirements needed to provide the best possible response to an incident in the Segment II construction area of I-64.

Prior to the construction actually beginning, a meeting was organized for all responsible parties to come together to discuss the project itself and its effect on emergency responses during the construction. This meeting would also include the contractor of the project and contracted tow companies that are on site 24/7 and responsible for towing vehicles during and after an incident. This first meeting was very productive. It was agreed that the group should meet every two months to discuss any issues and ways to improve responses. One item that was

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first mentioned was radio communications and how the fire and rescue units were unable to communicate with the state agencies (VSP and VDOT). It was determined that there was a need to bridge the radio communications gap between Fire, EMS and the state agencies. It was later determined that the Commonwealth of Virginia would provide a set of radios for programming with York County Department of Fire and Life Safety and James City County Fire Department radio channels. The radios would be assigned to VSP and VDOT (IMC) enabling them to communicate with all fire and rescue units responding in Segment II. It was also determined that the York,/Poquoson/Williamsburg Emergency Communications Center (ECC)/9-1-1 Center would handle all of the dispatch inquiries and radio traffic regardless of which fire and rescue agency is responding or which jurisdiction the incident existed (rather than two separate ECC/9-1-1 Centers handling the incident based on jurisdictional boundaries). In addition to a common fire/rescue dispatch channel, a pre-designated tactical channel for on-scene coordination was established as part of the normal response operating procedure and, once units were dispatched, the on-scene operational units would switch to that common tactical channel. Since all of the responding agencies (fire/rescue/ VSP and VDOT IMC) had these shared channels, they could all now effectively communicate directly.

After many discussions, the York County Fire Chief, James City County Fire Chief, as well as the VSP area First Sargent, requested that additional mile

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markers be installed indicating the mile and tenths of a mile along the construction segments. This allows a caller who may be reporting the emergency and who may be unfamiliar with the area to better and closer identify the incident's exact location.

Numerous VDOT highway awareness cameras are located along the interstate in strategic locations to assist in monitoring traffic flow and with locating incidents. The cameras are monitored by VDOT in the Transportation Operations Center (TOC). In an effort to provide our responders with time-sensitive situational awareness information regarding an incident on I-64, York County Fire and Life Safety decided to install a traffic monitoring capability at the two stations that respond to incidents on I-64. James City County Fire Department did the same in their primary interstate response station and the same capability was placed in the 9-1-1 centers. This capability includes a computer and large video display that shows all traffic cameras along the interstate in York County and James City County. This provides a visual means to see the status of the traffic and possible incident location on I-64 prior to leaving the stations, and for personnel remaining at the station to provide developing information while units are enroute to the incident in an effort to reduce confusion and delays.

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3. Cost of the Program:

The total project cost for the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety was just over \$1,900, which included the computers, video displays and accessories for the traffic camera monitoring ability at the two fire stations. The 9-1-1 Center was able to use an existing capability. The radio programming was done without any direct costs. It is felt that the cost for this program was minimal compared to the valuable information that is being received and used by our first responders during a response to I-64.

4. The Results/Success of the Program:

This program has already proven successful, in many ways, to aid in an effective and timely response to emergencies in the construction segments involving both York County and James City County. The use of a pre-designated and shared radio channels allows responding units the ability to discuss the location of the incident and other critical information while responding to emergencies on I-64. Having the VSP pre-staged in the work zone and the state trooper assigned a radio with the pre-designated shared channels allows the trooper to communicate to the fire and rescue responders, as well as VDOT IMC units, the exact location of the incident and if the responding units will be needed.

The additional mile markers have proven to be a huge asset with persons calling in an incident being able to correctly identify the location of incident in the

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construction segment. This information provides the ECC dispatchers the ability to dispatch the appropriate and closest assets to a given incident. Having mile markers one mile apart may not be adequate to determine the location. As we all know, when visiting an area you are not familiar with, anything that can assist in determining the incident location can positively affect the incident outcome.

Being able to better direct our responding units by having live video feeds from the traffic cameras is a tremendous asset as well. Having the ability of our first responders to evaluate the exact location of the incident and any other pertinent information prior to responding is very valuable. Additionally, once enroute to the incident, crews remaining at the stations can provide additional information on best routes and any observed hazards or other critical information.

5. Worthiness of Award:

The York County Department of Fire and Life Safety believes that this collective initiative is worthy of this prestigious award. The department was proactive in taking the initiative in order to better protect the citizens and visitors that travel in the construction segments by improving radio communications among the departments and other agencies that respond to emergencies in this area. This effort has greatly improved response capabilities to the various incidents, and has required minimum funding. These improvements were made using existing technology, such as the live video feed from VDOT, and the added

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ability of our fire stations to monitor emergency situations. We identified the need to better identify the area with more specific mile markers within the construction zones, and were able to successfully implement these changes. Therefore, officials requested additional mile markers at 2/10ths of a mile be installed along the construction zone to allow all involved to better determine the exact location of the incident. Our department is proud of the working relationships that have developed and/or improved during this project and the associated processes will continue well after this project is completed. Those involved believe we have not only identified problems but have solved many concerns. In order to continue this trend, we are already in discussions regarding Segment III, which is scheduled to start as early as July 2018. Additionally, we believe we have created a program that can be duplicated and could become a standard process for other localities to follow, not only in Virginia but across the nation.

6. Brief Program Summary:

A portion of Interstate 64 passes through York County. As such, many of our first responders are called to accident scenes throughout the year, especially during warmer months when visitors come to the area or pass through on their way to localities such as Virginia Beach and those in North Carolina along the coastline. Accidents occur often on this stretch of highway and responding to these incidents has become more of a challenge with the widening project that has

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been underway. In 2016, the department identified the need to partner with other local jurisdictions providing emergency response to ensure the safety of our first responders. Working with our nearby localities, we have attempted to address these safety issues.

Program Initiative: Emergency Response Initiatives During I-64 Construction



View of VDOT Camera Feed



Station personnel view the VDOT camera in their response district