

Resolution # _____ - Community Peace Officer Access to RCMP Radio Channels – Proposed by Foothills County 2019

WHEREAS rural municipalities employ Community Peace Officers (CPOs) under the Peace Officer Act; and

WHEREAS rural municipalities are responsible for ensuring the safety of CPOs; and

WHEREAS CPOs provide a supplementary level of municipal law enforcement within rural municipalities across Alberta where the RCMP are the police service of jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS CPOs provide assistance at emergency scenes where timely communication with RCMP members is imperative, both for officer and public safety; and

WHEREAS the Alberta First Responders Radio Communication System (AFRRCS) was designed and implemented by the Province of Alberta with the intention of improving and integrating radio communications among first responders from different agencies; and

WHEREAS CPOs have historically been provided access to monitor and transmit on RCMP radio channels through the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between individual municipalities and the RCMP; and

WHEREAS the RCMP across Alberta have encrypted their AFRRCS channels which now prevents CPOs from monitoring and transmitting on RCMP radio channels; and

WHEREAS this lack of direct, timely communication between CPOs and RCMP members presents increased officer safety risks for CPOs; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that Alberta Justice and Solicitor General and Service Alberta work with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – ‘K’ Division and National Headquarters, and any other organizations necessary, to develop policies and/or MOUs which permit CPOs to monitor and transmit on local RCMP AFRRCS radio channels in the normal course of their duties.

Member Background

The Government of Alberta has developed the Alberta First Responder Radio Communications System (AFRRCS), a two-way radio network, for First Responders in municipal, provincial and First Nations agencies across the province. The key reason was to improve safety and enhance communications between First Responder agencies. However, the opposite is happening as some agencies protect information to the exclusion of vital partners in serving our communities - AHS with excluding Fire Departments; and RCMP with excluding Community Peace Officers.

With the uptake of AFRRCS underway, problems started to emerge when the RCMP decided to encrypt their radio channels, thereby removing access of the supporting law-enforcement agencies to communicate with them. The result is that things are worse than before AFRRCS, because encryption of radio channels has completely separated agencies from functioning as teams to respond.

This problem affects the delivery of service and safety of CPOs in all rural municipalities throughout Alberta, particularly when rural crime is such an issue. CPOs are often the eyes and ears out there. If CPOs are not aware of what is going on with RCMP, they won't know to be on the lookout for suspects and vehicles as they drive around, and won't be able to pass along key information to the police about what they see.

The new AFRRCS radios and transmission technology provides quality communication; however, encryption has blocked easy access to the daily, operational communications between the RCMP and CPO's, and blocked situational awareness that results from the sharing of important information. CPO's can communicate with RCMP and other agencies in large-scale events via Common Event Talkgroup Channels. It's the day to day operational information the CPOs have been cut off from, that is the problem, which leads to their increase in safety risk.

If a CPO needs assistance, they now have to contact their dispatch, which in turn calls RCMP dispatch, which then forwards information to the RCMP member on duty. That's not practical or safe in an emergency situation due to the time this process takes. The only other alternative for the CPO is to call 911.

CPO's may get involved in extremely high-risk situations, which they would otherwise have avoided if they were able to hear RCMP communications. Examples have been adding up. Some from 2019:

- RCMP & other agencies, including CPOs, responded to a school bus collision. Because of the information sharing gaps since transition to AFRRCS, the CPOs had no clue that the individual involved in this collision was armed and had car-jacked a passerby who stopped to lend assistance.
- RCMP attempted to stop a vehicle that was associated with a complaint of shots fired. The vehicle evaded the RCMP and was later found on a nearby highway. During this incident with RCMP, a CPO was conducting speed enforcement at the same time and in the same area, placing him directly in the middle of a very dangerous situation without even knowing it.
- RCMP were dispatched to a male suffering from gunshot wounds. At the same time, a CPO was requested by a Public Works employee to attend a location for an injured person. Very little information was able to be relayed by the employee, and the CPO soon found himself in the middle of a criminal complaint that the RCMP were responding to, and that he was totally unaware of.
- A CPO narrowly escaped being rammed after responding to a simple "litter" complaint. Turned out they were armed and dangerous prolific offenders that were stripping copper wire. They had run from the RCMP earlier, but CPOs were unaware because of the AFRRCS disconnect. It took over 20 minutes for the CPO to contact and report the information to RCMP via telephone. The following day, the offenders were taken down at gunpoint in a high-risk stop.
- Unknowingly, a CPO became involved in a domestic dispute (RCMP file), when he pulled over a speeding vehicle.

To solve this, we request that the RCMP work with our municipalities through agreements, which would permit CPOs to communicate on local RCMP AFRRCS radio channels. If necessary, Security Clearance for CPOs could be provided so that RCMP confidentiality would be further recognized and respected. Please note that successful agreements are in place with the Alberta Sheriffs for CPOs to access Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) data. Ultimately, we would like to see AFRRCS used as it was originally intended: to improve safety and enhance communications among First Responders.

References available upon request.