

educational information about

# Proposition E-911

## November 3, 2009, Ballot

### Questions & Answers

#### What is Proposition E-911?

Proposition E-911, on the Nov. 3 ballot, would provide funding to improve emergency communications countywide through a one-tenth of one cent sales tax.

#### How would Proposition E-911 improve safety in St. Louis County?

Proposition E-911 focuses directly on improving the most critical emergency communications in St. Louis County by:

- **Providing up-to-date 911 technology** so that individuals placing emergency calls from their cell phones can be located quickly and reliably.
- **Replacing the outdated radio systems** that police, firefighters and paramedics rely on to protect all St. Louis County citizens --- those living in municipalities as well as those living in unincorporated St. Louis County.
- **Enabling all first responders to communicate** through a shared set of frequencies so that in times of emergency they can better coordinate lifesaving services through a compatible system.
- **Addressing federal requirements** that all public safety communications improve their radio frequencies in 2012. Other surrounding counties are already well on their way to meeting this requirement.
- **Improving emergency siren system** coverage and performance so that the sirens protect all of St. Louis County.

#### How will Proposition E-911 affect me and my family?

Proposition E-911 is designed to improve emergency communications throughout St. Louis County, enabling first responders to reliably communicate with each other and bringing 911 cell phone technology and county sirens up to current standards. Better communication means faster response times and more effective coordination of emergency services which save lives.

#### How much will Proposition E-911 generate?

Proposition E-911 will generate \$16 million annually. These funds will be used to pay off a \$100 million bond issue for system capital costs, plus provide funds for ongoing operations, maintenance and reserves.

#### What is my cost for Proposition E-911?

At one-tenth of one cent, Proposition E-911 will add one dime to a \$100 purchase. According to the Emergency Communications Commission's analysis, working countywide

will enable these improvements to be made more cost-efficiently than if each public safety entity worked alone to meet the FCC's new requirements.

### **What's wrong with the current emergency communications systems?**

First and foremost, they do not meet 2012 FCC frequency requirements. Secondly, first responders cannot reliably locate callers who dial 911 from cell phones. Thirdly, county emergency communications systems have not been upgraded in decades. That means police, firefighters and paramedics cannot communicate with each other through their current incompatible systems, and the county siren system has coverage gaps and cannot target areas with specific warnings. Proposition E-911 would address these needs.

### **Please provide more details on these problems.**

**911 Cell Calls:** When a person in need uses a landline to call 911, the caller's address appears on a screen at a dispatching center so the dispatcher can send help. However, when a person calls 911 from a cell phone, the location of that call may or may not be identified with the current technology in use countywide. With about two-thirds of 911 calls now coming from cell phones, this is an increasing safety concern.

**Radios:** The various radio systems used throughout St. Louis County were built on World War II technology which relies on each tower having a frequency and each fire or police department using a frequency linked to that tower. Today these multiple frequencies interfere with each other; first responders on one frequency cannot talk to first responders on neighboring frequencies; frequencies can become overcrowded during major emergencies; and if first responders travel more than several miles, they can lose contact with the tower and all others.

To address problems created by overcrowded radio frequencies, the FCC is requiring that older systems be upgraded in 2012, with more required upgrades likely to follow. In the case of St. Louis County, with more than 100 different police and fire agencies, replacing the current systems is the most cost-effective alternative. Failure to upgrade can result in FCC fines and loss of frequencies, but more importantly, it puts lives at risk through poor communications. Newer, high-grade frequencies have been reserved for departments in St. Louis County by the FCC but they must be used or we risk losing them to other areas that are actively taking the steps to meet FCC requirements.

**Sirens:** St. Louis County's siren system is decades old, is not supported with replacement parts, only serves parts of the county and cannot deliver localized voice warnings or instructions to citizens in times of emergencies.

### **Why is Proposition E-911 on the ballot now?**

The Federal Communication Commission requires all police, firefighters and paramedics to move emergency communications to the same radio frequencies in 2012. Without action, the FCC can begin to penalize those that fail to meet these national standards. The county's Emergency Communication Commission has stated that the real threat is to citizens who suffer delays in emergency services and to first responders who can't communicate quickly and clearly during dangerous situations.

## **How have other regions addressed the need for updated emergency communication services?**

Many have already enacted similar propositions and are on their way to implementing the technology for tracing 911 cell phone calls and to meeting the 2012 FCC deadline. St. Charles County, Jefferson County, St. Louis City and the counties around Springfield and Kansas City are already moving ahead.

## **What will happen if the proposition doesn't pass?**

The Emergency Communications Commission has secured the radio frequencies needed to meet the FCC's 2012 requirement. If Proposition E-911 doesn't pass, we risk losing those frequencies, facing fines and losing further communication capabilities if other funding could not be immediately obtained by the County.

## **What is the role of the county's Emergency Communication Commission?**

For the past eight years, the Emergency Communication Commission, made up of local police and fire officials, a municipal representative and citizens and appointed by the St. Louis County Council, has studied the best way to build and fund this enhanced emergency system. Funds are needed now to have the system ready by the 2012 FCC deadline. The FCC change is partly in response to the communication problems that greatly hampered emergency responses following Hurricane Katrina and the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

## **Why doesn't each municipality and fire district take care of its own emergency communication needs?**

There are 65 police departments and 43 fire agencies in St. Louis county, plus St. Louis County Police. Each entity could invest taxpayer dollars in new radios to meet the FCC requirement, but these systems would still be incompatible, they still would not be able to trace emergency cell phone calls and the county siren system would still be unreliable. The Emergency Communication Commission has indicated that by working countywide, the result will be a cost-effective system that is fully compatible, facilitating the coordination of mutual aid and emergency services in times of need, such as car crashes, flash flooding and fires or major disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

## **How do the capital costs of Proposition E-911 break down?**

- \$50 million for countywide infrastructure
- \$30 million for radios and local dispatching equipment
- \$10 million for 911 cell phone technology
- \$10 million for siren system replacement

## **How long will it take to pay off the bonds for these capital costs?**

Bonds are typically repaid over 20 years.

## **What are the ongoing operations, maintenance and reserves costs of this emergency communication system?**

Those costs are estimated at \$4 million.

## **Who is responsible for ensuring these funds are spent as promised?**

The Emergency Communication Commission of St. Louis County. The commissioners are appointed by the county and must consist of local police and fire chiefs, a municipal

representative and citizens. The commission ensures that the system is built, operated and maintained for the benefit of all emergency agencies and the citizens they serve. The commission must use county departments for procurement and certain support services to keep costs in check.

**How does the ballot language for Proposition E-911 read?**

Shall St. Louis County establish an emergency communications system fund to establish, operate and maintain an emergency communications system and for which St. Louis County shall levy a sales tax of one-tenth of one percent, to be paid into the fund for that purpose?

**Who can vote on Proposition E-911?**

Anyone registered to vote in St. Louis County, whether living in a municipality or in unincorporated St. Louis County.

**When is election day?**

Tues., Nov. 3. The polls are open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.

**How do I register to vote?**

You can register at the Board of Election Commissioners or at most public libraries, local city halls and many schools. You can call 615-1822 for the voter registration site nearest you. To vote Nov. 3, you must be registered by Oct. 7.

**How do I cast an absentee ballot?**

You can get an absentee ballot application or at <http://www.stlouisco.com/Elections/absentee/absenteeapplication.pdf> or by writing the Board of Election Commissioners at 12 Sunnen Dr., Maplewood, MO 63143.

Or, you can cast an absentee ballot in person during regular business hours at the Board of Election Commissioners from Sept. 22 to Nov. 2. That office will be open for absentee voting on one Saturday, Oct. 31, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. You can reach the Board of Election Commissioners at 615-1833.

**Produced by the St. Louis County Municipal League E-911 Educational Committee and reviewed and approved by legal counsel for educational information only. Changes to this information are not approved and may not comply with Missouri Statute section 115.646.**

**Go to [www.PropE911.org](http://www.PropE911.org) for further information.**