

# Hearing Oct. 10 to get feedback on emergency radio system upgrade

## Mount Tiburon site among those slated to get new equipment

By **HANNAH WEIKEL**  
*hwikel@thearknewspaper.com*

A public hearing is slated for Oct. 10 to gather feedback on a planned \$73-million overhaul of the Marin Emergency Radio Authority's public-safety radio system, including upgrades to its Mount Tiburon site.

The hearing is the next step in MERA's plans to implement a NextGen system, which officials say would improve radio communication coverage and reliability in the county by building eight new towers and upgrading most of the existing sites.

The two-hour public hearing starts at 6 p.m. Oct. 10 in the Marin County Board of Supervisors chambers, room 330 of the Marin Civic Center in San Rafael.

MERA is a 25-member joint powers authority created in 1998 to provide shared emergency radio services between fire, municipal, police, transit and water agencies around the county.

Last month, MERA released a subsequent environmental impact report, as required by the California Environmental Quality Act, for the new system. The report identifies the potential environmental effects of the project and recommends mitigation measures where needed.

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The sole antenna at 99½ Mount Tiburon Road is named in the report as one of three existing sites where new equipment could result in radio-frequency exposure that would exceed what the Federal Communications Commission deems safe for humans; the other two sites are atop the Civic Center and at the Marin County Sheriff's dispatch center in San Rafael.

However, experts say emission levels would only exceed human-safe levels at the Tiburon site when all 16 channels that connect to the antenna are being used simultaneously, which would likely only occur during a natural disaster or other major emergency.

Even in an instance where emissions exceed human-safe levels, MERA officials say only workers standing on top of a water tank about 15 feet away from the antenna could be exposed to potentially unsafe radio-frequency levels.

MERA will be required to post warning signs near the access to a water tank at the site to caution workers.

At all other times, the emissions would be closer to zero and well beneath what the FCC deems safe. Radio-authority officials say the new system is designed so emissions will not under any circumstances reach nearby homes or affect people using the Tiburon Ridge Trail that skirts the site.

MERA spokesman Dave Jeffries said the NextGen upgrades are necessary to adhere to FCC rules changes and improve the coverage and reliability in chronically spotty areas such as Lyford Cove and Paradise Drive in Tiburon.

The update, which is already several years behind schedule, would transition the service to 700-megahertz frequen-

700-megahertz channels.

The third alternative, submitted by the project's contractor Motorola Solutions, would utilize eight existing sites and add seven new ones, using the 700-megahertz frequencies.

The final alternative provides options to lessen the visual appearance of the proposed sites and also suggests three alternative locations.

In addition to attending this public hearing the week, community members can submit comments through Oct. 21 to MERA Operations Officer Ernest Klock at [mera-eir@marin-county.org](mailto:mera-eir@marin-county.org). Comments can also be mailed to Klock at 3501 Civic Center Drive, room 304, San Rafael, CA, 94903.

After the Oct. 21 deadline, MERA will finalize the system design and release a final report to the public.

From there, concerned parties have 30 days to bring a lawsuit under the California Environmental Quality Act, Jeffries said.

When MERA attempted to install its first radio tower in Tiburon in 2000, neighbors to the project sued for lack of transparency, tying up the system's implementation for several years.

This time around, MERA has aimed to be more transparent, Pearce said, asking for community support and funding for the project.

"We did a lot of outreach and due process on this," he said. "We just want to make sure we address any concerns if there are any concerns."

The draft environmental impact report can be viewed on the county website via [arkn.ws/MERA-Upgrades](http://arkn.ws/MERA-Upgrades).

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Reporter Hannah Weikel covers the city of Belvedere, as well as crime, courts and public safety issues on the Tiburon Peninsula. Reach her at 415-944-4627.