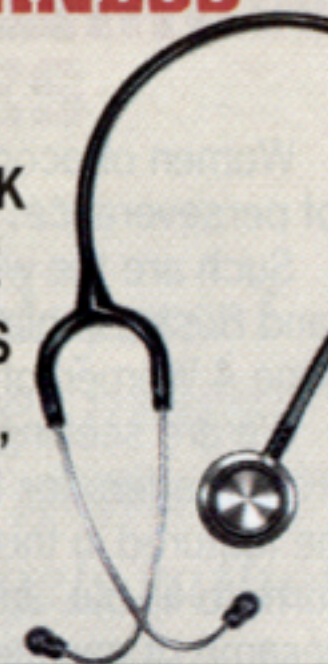


CLEVELAND BUSINESS

TOGETHERNESS

■ MORE DOCTORS HOOK UP TO ACHIEVE BETTER LEVELS OF EFFICIENCY, FIGHT LOW RATES. **PAGE 6**



Cleveland fire, EMS get help from new tracking devices

By **CHUCK SODER**
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A company in Independence has equipped Cleveland's fire and EMS vehicles with technology that city officials say will help speed up response times — by more than a minute, in EMS's case.

Independence Communications Inc. finished installing ruggedized computers and vehicle tracking devices in 80 fire department vehicles and 15 EMS vehicles in December, according to Erica Crysler, deputy press secretary for the city of Cleveland. The company also upgraded technology in 37 of EMS's first-response vehicles and enhanced the city's Computer Aided Dispatching

system, which dispatchers use when taking 9-1-1 calls.

Independence Communications received \$1 million to provide the hardware for EMS and to do the installation for both departments and for the dispatching system. The technology should help EMS cut response times by more than a minute from most calls, said Ed Eckart, EMS commissioner.

"Anytime we can shave minutes, we're going to have better survival rates," Mr. Eckart said.

The biggest benefit for EMS is that the technology can find which ambulance is closest to an emergency. Most of EMS's vehicles already were equipped with tracking devices that identified where they were, but

dispatchers still had to figure out which was closest to the scene. The upgraded dispatching system simply tells them which ambulance to send.

The fire department did not estimate how the technology might speed response times, but some benefits will help both the department and EMS, Ms. Crysler said.

For example, the computers will give first responders quick access to directions, patient medical histories and information that callers give dispatchers, all while preventing inaccuracies caused when information is relayed verbally. They also could be used to send from ambulances to hospitals information such as electronic cardiographs of patients' heart beats, Mr. Eckart said.

"It's going to significantly improve cardiac outcome in the city of Cleveland," he said.

Independence Communications also received \$5 million to equip 350 Cleveland Police Department vehicles with computers between 2002 and 2004, according to company president Don DiGeronimo. Officers can use the equipment to access criminal databases without going through dispatchers first.

Mr. DiGeronimo, who lives in Independence, said he enjoys doing local business. His company already had installed similar technology in 2,750 law enforcement vehicles in Kentucky and another 550 in Detroit, but all the while he wanted to do more in Cleveland. ■