



WGEM-TV 10

911 Woes

October 16, 2007

If you have an emergency in a rural part of Missouri, calling 911 on a cell phone may not guarantee help is on the way.

18 counties in Missouri, including a few in our area, still have no wireless 911 service.

"Many of the issues that you see passed in the legislature and in Jefferson City have a name attached to them: you have 'Jake's Law', you have different bills that have been passed because someone died before it--open everybody's eyes that we have a problem," said Mike Kindle, with the National Emergency Number Association.

"We're trying hard not to have anybody die before we make this an issue."

So why is Missouri the last state in the country without a way to fund wireless 911 services? Kindle says that Missouri voters have turned down initiatives to fund 911 services across the state twice before.

"Some of the legislature has put on the books that the voters could either approve or disapprove that, and we failed miserably twice," he said. "It's just hard to educate five million people in Missouri that their cell phones are not going to locate them when they call 911."

One way to pay for wireless 911 technology is a fee on cell phone bills that wouldn't require voter approval.

Kindle says the governor's office and lawmakers have said they will make this issue a priority in the upcoming legislative session.

And there's some more bad news for wireless 911 service in Missouri: an upcoming FCC decision is expected to cap funding for telecommunications development in rural areas.

The President and CEO of US Cellular says if there isn't money to put up more towers, then safety remains a factor.

"E-911 service allows a person in trouble to get in touch with first responders, where the system itself will locate the person within a very narrow range--so we can find the person in trouble, [but] it doesn't work without wireless towers," said John E. Rooney, President and CEO of US Cellular.

To learn more about what the FCC is working on, and how you can have a say in the matter, visit www.connectingruralamerica.org

