



Ringling In Rural Missouri

COLUMBIA - U.S. Cellular announced Thursday that they plan to expand their rural network.

The new company initiative would mean 39 new cell tower locations over the next 2 years, making a marked difference in the ability of rural Missourians to call in emergencies on their cell phones.

The company would prefer to use money from the Universal Service Fund to build the new towers, but the Federal Communications Commission is considering placing a cap on those funds. If the proposed federal cap goes through, millions of dollars in new federal funds that would have come into Missouri annually, will be put on hold indefinitely.

U.S. Cellular hopes it can continue to build towers in rural areas.

"As long as we have access to those funds we'll continue to look for those areas that are under-served and need quality cell sites to allow that service to be there," said Jay Ellison, U.S. Cellular's Vice President and CEO.

The ability of first responders to handle emergencies in rural areas often hinges on the cell phone coverage in the area, a fact that Fire Chief Steve Paulsell often sees firsthand.

Paulsell can recall many incidents in rural Missouri where cell phone coverage could have made a difference in an emergency, and says that people in rural areas need quicker access to emergency services.

"People were working on their tractors or their combines and cutting wood with chainsaws, a variety of things and did not have cell phone coverage and did not have cell phones with them and tragically many died, laid entrapped in combines and hay bailers and things like that until someone came to look for them," Paulsell said.

Edited by: Kyle Stokes

Reported by: Karina Petersen