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911 system update put off

By KIM SCHMIDT , Hub Staff Writer

KEARNEY — The threat of severe weather has postponed the update of a new 911 system at the Kearney/Buffalo County Law Enforcement Center.

The update was scheduled for 3 a.m. today, but Buffalo County Sheriff Neil Miller decided Tuesday evening, after many winter storm warnings, to postpone the conversion. Miller expects an avalanche of calls to hit the 911 center today and Thursday as rain changes to snow later today and with blizzard conditions expected Thursday. That leaves Miller unsure when he'll make the switch.

"I'm just really afraid it's going to be busy for them (dispatchers)," he said this morning. "I didn't want them to try and run that new system if it gets busy. It's just too hard on them with this weather."

The sheriff's office maintains the 911 phone system.

The system was last updated in 1999 after the communications center flooded following a heavy rainstorm while roof repairs were being made. Motorola installed the system, but it has since been discontinued.

The new system has been installed and is operating at the two backup sites in the basement of city hall and at the Kearney Volunteer Fire Department's Fire Station Two. But the main 911 system is housed at the law enforcement center.

Two dispatchers will work from the city hall sites while a third dispatcher will be at KVFD Station Two, until the process is complete. Once the installation is done, dispatchers will return to the law enforcement center for their regular operations.

The new 911 phone system has voice over Internet protocol, meaning when dispatchers work at the backup sites they will have emergency 911 capabilities as they do at the law enforcement center. The capabilities include mapping and the location of landline phones.

The old backup 911 phone system didn't have that feature.

"What that really does for us is to not only use it as a backup, but when we have events where we need more dispatchers, they can work together at the same time from three different locations," Miller said.

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