

City seeks \$11.2M for upgrades

Decontamination units, new 911 center, radios wanted

By Carl Weiser

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WASHINGTON - Cincinnati has asked Congress to give it \$11.2 million for new homeland security equipment - some that the city hopes never to use.

On the shopping list: money for a new 911 center, a high-tech emergency dispatching system, and 14 mobile decontamination units that would be set up in front of hospitals in the event of a terrorist attack.

If a chemical attack happens at, say, Paul Brown Stadium, fans probably wouldn't wait the 20 to 30 minutes that the fire department now needs to transport and set up its generator-powered shower-in-a-tent decontamination unit.

Instead, they would rush to local hospitals, and that could contaminate and force those emergency rooms to close, said Edward Dadosky, district chief for the Cincinnati Fire Department. That's why the mobile decontamination units, about \$200,000 each, are needed at local hospitals.

"We've been attacked. Mass casualty. All hospitals are in play," he said, outlining a hypothetical situation. "All

of the hospitals in our region need to have this decontamination capability."

The city hopes to get \$2.8 million for the decontamination units. Cincinnati and Hamilton County have units now, but they must be taken to a location and set up.

Area hospitals right now couldn't decontaminate more than a handful of people at one time, said Colleen O'Toole, vice president of the Greater Cincinnati Health Council. The nonprofit agency serves all the area's hospitals, which are geared for small industrial accidents, not terror attacks.

The new units the city hopes to get are trailers.

"You wheel up a trailer, make a couple quick connections, and you'd have water," Dadosky said. Like the tents, the trailers would have two entrances, one for men and one for women. They would be stationed at hospitals.

The city's other request is \$8.4 million to upgrade just about everything the city does to collect emergency information and send out responders.

Cincinnati needs radios that allow police and firefighters to talk to each other and to

Emergency: City wants \$11.2M upgrades

From Page B1

other agencies, and a computerized dispatching system that would allow mapping. The city also needs a way to locate cell phone callers and a new 911 center in a less publicly accessible location than the current one at Central Parkway and Ezzard Charles Drive.

"It is surrounded by a school and a lot of public access kind of venues," said Rashad Young, Cincinnati's assistant city manager. "That's not the best place to put your critical communication infrastructure." The city has a building in mind, but Rashad declined to say where.

The city also is switching to an 800-megahertz radio system that allows dispatchers to communi-

cate with Hamilton County responders, Young said. Some federal money also would help pay for that.

While top officials in the fire department and police department can communicate, firefighters and police officers on the scene of an attack now can't talk by radio, said Roy Winston, the district fire chief in charge of communications. It will be at least 16 months before a switchover to 800-megahertz equipment is complete.

If Congress doesn't provide the \$8.4 million to modernize the city's communications equipment, "we'll be behind the eight ball in terms of our level of readiness and preparedness in terms of homeland defense," Young said.

The city's two Republican congressmen, Rep. Rob Portman and

Steve Chabot, requested the \$11.2 million in a letter sent last month to the House subcommittee writing the first annual budget for the new Department of Homeland Security.

Sen. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, put in the same requests in the Senate. His spokeswoman, Amanda Flaig, said he was optimistic about getting the money - especially since he's on the appropriations committee.

"That's a huge help," she said.

Rep. Ken Lucas, a Democrat who represents Northern Kentucky, made three homeland security requests. He has kept the requests secret, saying he does not release member-to-member letters.

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