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Emergency navigation system eyed for schools

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ST. CLAIRSVILLE - The Belmont County Emergency Management Agency is using grant funding from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help improve emergency response to local schools. During Wednesday's meeting of the Belmont County Commissioners, the board received one bid in the amount of \$92,500 from Foremost Safety Solutions Inc of Macedonia, Ohio for the first phase of the Emergency Navigational System for Belmont County schools. The bid was turned over to Dave Ivan, director of the Belmont County Emergency Management Agency, for review and recommendation. Ivan said the county EMA currently has around \$96,000 in grant funding from the Department of Homeland Security.

Commissioner Chuck Probst explained that a committee of local individuals decides how that funding is used, and funds that are currently available will help complete the first phase of the Emergency Navigational System in the local schools. "This will aid first responders when they go into particular structures," said Ivan. "Things are color codes, there is different signage It really gets into particulars from locating gas shutoffs to electrical panels."

Ivan said if an emergency arises in one of the local schools, the system can help pinpoint locations within the building and familiarize personnel from law enforcement, fire departments and emergency medical services - even those who may have never been inside that particular building - with details of the structure's layout.

The plan developed for the system will include a wealth of important information that will be contained in books and CDs that will be available to the pertinent emergency responders. It will include maps that include potential staging areas for emergency personnel at each school, sites where a medical helicopter can land and more information.

"There are a lot of details that go into this," said Ivan, who said the information will be a tremendous tool for emergency personnel who may have to respond to situations in large buildings where a majority of the children in the county are gathered during the day. "It takes the guess work out of it."

Probst added, "It will also help the schools when they have to evacuate for any particular purpose. "This is really a way to increase public safety for the schools."

Phase one of the project will help develop the system for Barnesville, Martins Ferry, St. Clairsville and Union Local schools, as well as the Belmont County Career Center. Systems in other public schools will be addressed in the future as additional grant funding is secured, officials said. "We're looking to go into the private and parochial schools as well," said Ivan.