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FBI CJIS mandate to require encryption of law enforcement radio traffic in Douglas County – change to occur later in October

LAWRENCE — Law enforcement radio communication channels in Douglas County will be fully encrypted on Oct. 15 to comply with a mandate from the FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Security Policy.

The policy change went into effect in December 2022 and required local and state agencies to gain the capabilities to be in compliance with encrypting radio traffic to protect personal information transmitted over the air.

Law enforcement officers and dispatchers frequently communicate over the radio and transmit personal information, including names and birth dates of individuals, to verify a person's identity, for example, at a vehicle stop or to verify warrant information.

"This was not our choice at the local level. It is an unfunded mandate from the federal government, but the alternative in not complying would undermine our ability to function as law enforcement agencies and ultimately threaten public safety," Sheriff Jay Armbrister said. "Speaking for the Sheriff's Office, we are committed to being as transparent as we can with the community. For example, for two years we have listed our call log report on our website at DGSO.org and will continue to do so."

The encryption change means law enforcement channels dispatched through Douglas County Emergency Communications and typically heard via radios and scanner applications and websites will not be accessible to the general public.

Fire and medical radio traffic will not be encrypted as personal information is generally not communicated via the radio to comply with HIPAA regulations.

Armbrister said airing addresses for calls had also presented issues for officer safety in the community and that the encryption will again allow officers and dispatchers to fully air locations without the threat or fear of uninvolved persons or those who wish to harm officers coming to calls.

"In the accepted practice of protecting people's personal information, it is prudent that we follow all accepted mandated practices from the federal government," said Tony Foster, director of Douglas County Emergency Communications.

The FBI CJIS policy is aimed at protecting the privacy of victims, witnesses and suspects when their personal information is transmitted over a law enforcement radio. This can also include Social Security numbers, addresses, phone numbers and medical and mental health conditions and histories.

Since 2022, Douglas County has worked through the ECC to get the technology to comply with the policy. Local agencies must pass CJI audits to comply, and they risk being fined or losing access to the CJI system. Other counties in Kansas have worked to recently encrypt law enforcement traffic, including most police agencies in Johnson County.

DGSO Call Log Report

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