



Office of Ellis County Judge Todd Little  
**For Immediate Release**

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## **“New Communications Network Enabled Rapid Emergency Response”**

Ellis County, TX – Following a tornado that touched down near Forreston on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, Ellis County’s emergency services led a coordinated and efficient response, thanks to a newly-integrated public safety communications network. By investing in a new communications tower, a new dispatch system, and improved mobile radios, the county enabled various volunteer, municipal, and county-level emergency service organizations to communicate with one another in real-time for a unified response operation.

The new network, which first went live less than two weeks before the tornado, quickly proved its worth in emergency situations. For the first time in Ellis County, first responders from multiple agencies communicated directly with one another via a county-wide network rather than waiting for messages to be relayed across different sub-channels and uncoordinated radio towers. The potential for miscommunication and delay of vital information was greatly diminished, and the task-delegation process for emergency services was streamlined.

“Without a doubt, the new public safety communications system enabled our first responders to reach those in danger much more quickly,” said County Judge Todd Little. “For what it cost, the network is saving our citizens that much more in damage – and lives.”

Located near Forreston, the network’s new radio tower operates in the 700 MHz spectrum, so its signals can penetrate thick foliage, concrete barriers, and most man-made structures with ease. As Ellis County’s population expands into growing suburban communities, the 700 MHz signal will ensure that emergency responders continue to receive clear messages even in areas with dense development.

The integrated radio system also conforms to the FCC’s Project 25 program, which established digital standards for public safety communications that include the latest encryption and data-transfer protocols. The whole system is backwards-compatible with existing radio infrastructure, so there is no one point of failure for the county’s emergency communications.

The night of May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Ellis County’s new public safety network was put through its first major emergency situation when a tornado crossed over I-35E and damaged vehicles, injured drivers, and destroyed several mobile homes near the highway. A county-wide alert was issued over the emergency network, and within minutes, every available emergency responder in the county knew his or her role. Damage control, search & rescue, and recovery efforts were carried out with a high degree of efficiency through the next morning.

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