



**Snohomish County**

**County Executive's Office**

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## New County agency would aim for greater security, emergency coordination in post 9/11 world

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*Transition to clear way to putting Department of Emergency Services under  
Snohomish County management*

Cities in the independent agency charged with planning for security and emergencies – such as terrorist attacks, earthquakes or floods - voted today to dissolve the organization, a move that paves the way to transferring management duties to Snohomish County.

The new County office would open January 1, 2006, pending adoption of a transition plan by October.

The new emergency management structure promises greater coordination of security functions, particularly with such federal agencies as the U.S. Navy and the Department of Homeland Security, which was created after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

“This is all about security and preparedness,” said Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon, who just returned from meetings with the state’s Congressional delegation in Washington, D.C., where homeland security funding was discussed. “It is imperative that Snohomish County government be at the forefront of emergency planning for its citizens.”

The proposal to transfer emergency management functions from the Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management (DEM) to Snohomish County government was approved by a 9 to 3 vote.

The County's intent is to:

- Improve management and identify cost-savings by eliminating redundancies;
- Provide continuity of oversight and management for security and emergency response;
- Maintain assessments now paid by member cities and towns at current levels; and,
- Give contracting cities and towns an equal voice in the County department with the creation of a new "Emergency Management Advisory Board."

It is the County's goal that the transition to a new County Department of Community Security and Emergency Management be transparent and completed at no additional cost to taxpayers, Executive Reardon said. He added that he believes the new structure will maximize the County's ability to attract federal Homeland Security dollars and manage additional grants.

Local elected officials who sit on the DEM board agreed.

"This is an important step forward for regional security and emergency management," said Marysville Mayor Dennis Kendall, chair of DEM. "The County and cities are working well together and this is just another example."

Granite Falls Mayor Lyle Romack, vice chair of DEM, added, "We know there are important security issues that we are all facing. This move is about continued safety for all of our citizens. We want to make sure that we are in the best possible position to get funding from the federal Department of Homeland Security."

Despite DEM's name and use of the Snohomish County logo, it is not currently a County department. It is overseen by the County Executive and the Mayors of its member communities – Arlington, Darrington, Gold Bar, Granite Falls, Index, Lake Stevens, Marysville, Monroe, Mukilteo, Snohomish, Stanwood and Sultan. Snohomish County currently contributes \$300,000 a year to its operation – roughly 75 percent of the operating budget.

Executive Reardon noted that King County and Pierce County both manage their own emergency management functions.

In the past there has been confusion over DEM's link to the County. The most recent example was when the State believed it had issued two Urban Area Security Initiative grants (UASI) to the County, but instead found they had gone to DEM. The County is also worried about potential liability issues arising from peoples' confusion over agency control.

The cities can now opt to contract with the County and its new department for emergency services.

The next step for Snohomish County is to develop a detailed action plan to effectively manage the transition. Its members will be drawn from Executive Reardon's office, representatives from communities that anticipate contracting with the County, DEM, the Prosecutor's Office, and two County departments, Human Resources and Finance.

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