Fulfilling big needs in rural Kansas

- **Agency/Organization Needs** – Ford County agencies, including Ford County Fire and EMS, and Ford County Sheriff's Office, have joined FirstNet to provide its first responders with reliable modern communications tools.

- **Networking Solution** – Modems, routers, apps and deployables all connected to FirstNet

- **Agency value** – Providing responders with reliable connectivity so they can serve their communities, reduce spending and increase productivity and safety

- **Industry Focus** – Public safety

- **Size** – 52 connections across multiple agencies, including law enforcement, fire and EMS.

- **WATCH VIDEO**
- **READ BLOG**

Ford County depends on FirstNet for reliable communications

Ford County, Kansas, sits in the middle of the country and covers a mere 1,100 square miles. With just under 40,000 residents, it's a community with a "small town" feel. Marked mostly by agricultural land, the County also has deep canyons and valleys that hinder reliable communication. In fact, *The Atlantic* ranked its county seat of Dodge City as the third most isolated city of its size in the country.

This varied terrain creates coverage problems for first responders. That's especially true in remote areas of the county. And with the closest large city or town at least 2 to 3 hours away in any direction, Ford County needs reliable communication.

That's why the Ford County Fire and EMS Department, Ford County Sheriff's Office and Ford County Emergency Management decided to join FirstNet®.

"The risks we face are that we're a long way away from anybody to come help us," said Michael Brown, Deputy Director of Ford County Communications. "So, we have to find something that is reliable that we can deploy immediately. That way we're not putting the lives of our dispatchers, the public citizens and our first responders at risk."

Helping Fire and EMS

Rob Boyd, Chief of Fire and EMS for Ford County, said the varied terrain creates challenges for the fire department.

Fire chief equips ambulances with FirstNet-enabled modems

The department has been using FirstNet-enabled drones to stream live footage from fires to the chief's phone or computer.

"We have a lot of large, wide-open agricultural land," said Rob Boyd, Chief of Fire and EMS for Ford County. "With a 40 mile-per-hour wind pushing a fire across there, we have to be able to communicate and set our tactics together, so that we can put it out without losing anybody or property."

The department has been using FirstNet-enabled drones to stream live footage from fires to the chief's phone or computer. This way, he can accurately direct his firefighters to hotspots they can't see on the ground, saving taxpayers' money and preventing further damage.

Securing patient data

Chief Boyd also equipped the department's seven ambulances with Cradlepoint modems with FirstNet SIMs. And he's in the process of being able to transmit 12-lead EKGs to the emergency room.

Transportation time to the hospital can take 30 minutes or more from the far corners of Ford County. And being able to transmit crucial patient data and ETAs to the hospital is critical to saving lives, he said.

FirstNet allows Ford County EMS to send patient EKGs

"That's a great tool for us. We can get that 12-lead EKG sent to the hospital. They can show it to the cardiologist and have the Cath Lab waiting there when we get there."

Rob Boyd,
Chief of Fire and EMS
Ford County, Kansas

to the hospital while enroute, allowing the cardiologist to review the data and have a Cath Lab waiting when the patient arrives.

"There is nobody else out in this area that's able to do that," said Chief Boyd. "That's a great tool for us. We can get that 12-lead EKG sent to the hospital. They can show it to the cardiologist and have the Cath Lab waiting there when we get there. Having that Cath Lab team already in place is going to be huge to lifesaving."

Keeping deputies connected, safe

Ford County Sheriff Bill Carr wanted to ensure that his 32 sworn deputies and two canine officers were in constant contact with one another, regardless of their location within the county.

He accomplished this by installing FirstNet routers and modems in each vehicle, as well as the FirstNet Active911 app, which displays an alert on the user's phone detailing the type of call and its location.

Sheriff's office enjoying higher officer visibility, productivity with FirstNet

Officers on the scene of an accident can go into the CAD system and fill out reports from their vehicles – and have everything done before the wrecker arriving, Carr said.

"When it comes to radios or phone usage, it's definitely a must for us to make sure we have equipment that's in working order for deputies for their safety concerns. And more importantly, the citizens we serve," Carr said.

Since joining FirstNet, Ford County has enjoyed increased savings and productivity and higher officer visibility – especially when responding to car accidents.

"In the past, we had to write everything down on a notepad, go back to the office, sit down, call dispatch, ask them to fax us a copy of the CAD printouts," Carr explained. "Today, while you're on scene waiting for the wrecker, or cleanup, just fire up your MDT, go into the CAD system, report system. We can fill out the reports on scene. Basically, have everything done prior to the wrecker even arriving."

"This keeps my staff out and visible," he added. "And not driving back and forth saves on fuel consumption, keeps them in the rural areas where I want them to be. I want them to be seen, out patrolling more."

> "When it comes to radios or phone usage, it's definitely a must for us to make sure we have equipment that's in working order for deputies' safety concerns. And more importantly, the citizens we serve."
>
> Bill Carr, Sheriff,
> Ford County, Kansas

Addressing the COVID threat

As the COVID-19 threat intensified, reducing the drive time back and forth from the field to the station also reduced contact with others and helped the department cut down on cross-contamination. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic took the world by storm. And every corner of the country – including Ford County – felt the effects. With students staying home from school, the commercial network became clogged thanks to video games and video streaming.

"That stunning failure in the network connectivity shifted our paradigm, because immediately we needed priority. We needed preemption," says Elliot Linke, Director of Emergency Communications for Ford County. "In less than 24 hours (more like eight hours), I had a FirstNet SIM in my phone. And I immediately ordered more devices."
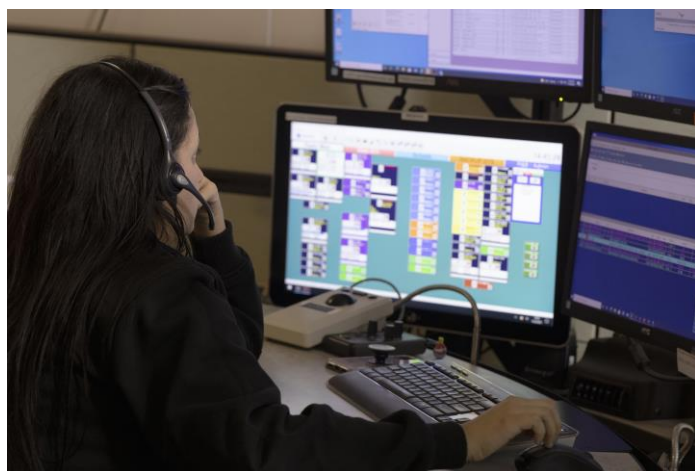
Providing innovative tools to help Ford County get most out of its connections

"We had full confidence in FirstNet because we had full insight into FirstNet."

Elliot Linke,
Director of Emergency
Communications,
Ford County.

"We had FirstNet devices that we could order and have deployed within 24 hours, which was a tremendous success for us," Linke said.

"Our emergency manager had the National Guard on the way to set up COVID-19 testing locations," he said. "And they showed up with no communications support. We supported the National Guard with data and voice services. And we coordinated all of that through emergency management."

The reliability and bridging gaps in communication was groundbreaking. And FirstNet took it one step further with innovative tools to help Ford County get the most out of its connections.

"We had full confidence in FirstNet because we had full insight into FirstNet. We knew if sites were down in our area. We knew if there was any impact on services. We knew what the problems were on the network, if any," Elliot continued.

FirstNet provided multiple solutions to take Ford County's level of service to its citizens to the next level. Now, the county is saving money and has seen an increase in productivity, all while delivering an unprecedented level of service to its citizens.

FirstNet provided multiple solutions to take Ford County's level of service to its citizens to the next level.

"We had FirstNet devices that we could order and have deployed within 24 hours, which was a tremendous success for us," Linke said. "We had people working at remote sites. We had people working in austere environments. We had people who were working remotely, doing contact tracing, doing testing that we now needed to support. And we were able to do that very rapidly and implement those systems very rapidly with FirstNet."