

July 12, 2014

Representative Chris Sainato
PA House of Representatives
20 South Mercer Street
New Castle, PA 16101

Dear Chris,

I am writing to express my concern over the new Pennsylvania State Police dispatch system (AR). I have been in business since 1970 and have been an authorized tower for the State Police since 1975. I also provide towing service for municipal police departments and have been an authorized tower for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission for 22 years. My towing company has not signed on as an AR tower because of major areas of concerns with the new AR system's inefficiencies and safety issues.

The previous system of dispatch for the State Police was done by a local dispatcher who would dispatch a towing company after contacted by the State Trooper at the scene. This dispatcher was the go-between the Trooper at the scene and the towing company. The dispatcher asked the towing company if they have a truck(s) available, gives the location of the scene, and asks the estimated time of arrival. The tow truck driver needs to know the type of truck needed, flatbed, wrecker recovery trucks, and heavy or medium duty trucks. These are not questions that can be readily answered by the new AR system "bing" to the towing company's cell phone. The immediate communication of these items to the towing company insures that the proper equipment is sent to the scene with the quickest possible response time.

Problems occur when directions are not precise. Recently, an accident on Neshannock Falls Road took an AR towing company out of Farrell one hour and fifteen minutes to respond to the accident because he did not have adequate directions. This is just one example of how the new dispatch system could become very difficult due to the lack of details that are crucial for towing companies to properly respond to the State Police in a timely fashion.

This increase in response time also causes major safety concerns. The State Trooper at the scene of an accident is concerned for the safety of the people involved and also getting the road conditions at the scene cleared for normal traffic flow to avoid more accidents. When response times are longer the road conditions are unsafe for longer periods of time. The Trooper can often not leave the scene until all vehicles have been cleared and the road is back in clear operation. The longer response time is an inefficient use of the Trooper's time. Another incident occurred in Hickory Township on April 19, 2014. The volunteer fire department had to wait an extra 45 minutes for the AR towing company to come from Ellwood City. These volunteer firemen take time away from their jobs and families to provide emergency services to our communities. Both of these accident scenes, my towing company could have responded to within 15 minutes.

When living in a rural area it is crucial to have a live dispatcher that knows the area and local weather conditions. An example of this is an accident my towing company got dispatched to this past winter. Five minutes after the original dispatch call came in the State Police dispatcher called us back to tell us what route was best to use due to the weather conditions and trees being down near the accident site. This helped us to get there as quick as possible and without having safety issues or road troubles of our own. This is another reason it is crucial to have constant communication with the dispatcher. This would not have happened with the new AR system.

When towing for the PA Turnpike Commission, my drivers are in constant communication with their dispatch system via two-way radios in our trucks. In some of the rural areas that we service, we are unable to be in constant communication in any other form other than a radio system. Cell phone service is not an option

and we would be unable to receive these auto generated messages. So the Commission requires us to have a radio to maintain contact with the scene of the accident. This has proven to be reliable and convenient for all parties involved.

Prior to the AR towing dispatch we had six approved towing facilities available in our Lawrence County area. Each of which covered its own territory. Two of which had over 60 years of service and one had over 40 years of service. Since the new AR dispatch system the number of available towing companies has been reduced to two; neither of which were part of the original six towers and one not even located in Lawrence County. One AR towing company is from Farrell, 8 miles north of Lawrence County. Customers do not want to drive the extra distance from Lawrence County to Farrell to redeem their car from the towing company.

The second AR towing company is from Ellwood City. Since this Ellwood City towing company was not originally an authorized tower for the PA State Police, I have to speculate that this company may not meet the original safety standards needed to tow for the State Police. This towing company's truck that I have observed does not have the proper requirements needed to respond to all State Police calls.

The new AR dispatch system has caused much longer wait times for our fire departments and our police departments. I know that there must be issues with this system's timeliness because on Friday May 9th I was called by State Police directly (not through the AR system) to handle an accident on 376 at Mitchell Road, which is 4 miles from me, to assist with an emergency in a one-lane construction zone. It was crucial that the roadway be cleared quickly due to the safety concerns in a construction zone. We were able to respond within 15 minutes. I have heard similar stories from the other towing companies in Lawrence County.

I'm unsure why Pennsylvania is trying to utilize a system that will only result in inefficiencies and safety hazards. I'm asking that the legislators consider alternatives to this system such as utilizing the 9-1-1 dispatch service which is local and could better meet the needs of the State Police. I sincerely appreciate your time and consideration with this issue and am available at your convenience to provide you with more information if needed. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mark E. McConnell, President
McConnell, Inc.