

Fiber Optics Network Will Be Used for Emergency Communications

By Christopher Dunagan

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Local governments, schools and taxing districts throughout Kitsap County could soon be communicating across a high-speed intranet with almost unlimited capacity, said Ed Stern, a Poulsbo City councilman who has been pushing the high-tech system for years.

Kitsap County along with local cities and tribes have signed an agreement to create Kit-Net, a network built upon the fiber optics "backbone" installed across the county by the Kitsap Public Utility District.

"At its essence, this is an emergency response network," Stern said. "The beauty of this system is that it can even operate without electricity. If one part is cut off, it feeds back on other loops in a self-healing fashion."

Because most neighborhoods have schools, people may be able to call for emergency help during a disaster when normal telephone lines and even cell phone service have been knocked out or overwhelmed, Stern said.

The plan is for all government entities throughout Kitsap County to have access to the network at minimal cost. Once on board, they can use the system for all daily uses —from simple e-mail to full-feature video conferencing, Stern said.

"We're talking about true broadband with virtually unlimited capacity," he said.

Currently, state and federal laws prevent the utility district from leasing its fiber optics backbone directly on the retail market, but Stern hopes that will change. He said his dream is for Kitsap County to offer accommodations for workers from major companies, such as Microsoft and Safeco. With video conferencing and other Internet services, such employees could work out of their homes or local offices, reducing the transportation and environmental problems that continue to plague the Puget Sound region.

Kit-Net will be under the control of the Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council, which amended its bylaws to accommodate the consortium of local governments. Any local taxing district may join the network, including schools, libraries, fire districts, ports, sewer districts, water districts and others. Hookup is expected to begin early next year.

