

# 911 fee takes affect

By Don Patterson

*Interim Editor*

The organization responsible for operating 911 phone services is expecting to receive a share of a new cell phone fee to cover the cost of operating emergency call services.

Albertans will see a small increase on their cell phone bills starting next week to help cover the costs of 911 call centres in the province.

Starting April 1, a 44 cent monthly fee will be charged to every cell phone user in Alberta. Revenues from the new fee will be shared with operators of Alberta's 911 call centres.

The chairperson of the Foothills Regional Emergency Services Commission (FRESC) said they are still working out how much of the revenues from the new fee the organization will receive. FRESC owns and operates foothills 911 services. It operates a call centre at Oilfields Hospital in Black Diamond, dispatching calls for fire departments and forwarding calls for police and ambulances to dispatch centres elsewhere.

"We would be very appreciative of this funding that will come from the 911 cell phone fees," said Suzanne Oel, FRESC chairperson.

The Province already



PHILLIP CURRIE/OWW

A new 44 cent monthly cell phone fee to help cover the cost to operate Alberta's 911 call centres comes into affect on April 1.

charges a 44 cent per month fee on all landline telephones and this fee will remain the same. However, the majority of 911 calls are coming from cell phones.

"It's a small amount, but previously all the costs associated with funding a lot of the 911 call centres was charged to landlines and landlines are dying and the move to cell phones are becoming more prominent," said Patrick Gall, Alberta Municipal Affairs spokesperson.

He said almost 70 per cent of all 911 calls are being made by cell phones and the number is rising.

"Obviously we need to distribute that cost a little

more evenly so it's not just landline users that are paying for it," said Gall.

He didn't know how the funds would be split up between different call centres, but said those with a higher volume of calls will receive a larger share of the funding.

Fines for frivolous 911 calls will see a significant boost to \$5,000 for first time offenders and \$10,000 for repeat offenders.

Gall said they aren't targeting pocket dialed 911 calls.

"These are cases where individuals deliberately are calling in as a joke, just a complete abuse of the system," said Gall.