

# County contracts with church for emergency comms

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During an emergency, Johnson County will now broadcast communications via the Buffalo Baptist Church's radio station, KBTG 88.3 FM.

Johnson County commissioners approved a memorandum of understanding between the county and the church during its April 1 meeting for use of the station in the event of an emergency.

The county used to work with local radio stations operated by Big Horn Mountain Radio Network – KBBS, Kix 96.5 and the Peak – for its emergency communications, until stations went dark in September.

“Our options are fairly limited,” Jimmy Cataline, the county's emergency manager, told commissioners.

The church's FM radio station

reaches Buffalo and most of its surroundings. Cataline said that the department considered contracting with Sheridan Media but that he was concerned that getting to Sheridan during an emergency would be difficult.

“Ideally, if this partnership works out, I would really like to investigate some either hazard mitigation grant monies or some Homeland Security monies in the future that we can potentially bolster the network and be able to reach farther down towards Kaycee,” he said. “Ultimately, I just want to get this started.”

The county would use the radio station during an emergency or other major event.

As part of the previous agreement with Big Horn Mountain Radio Network, the county installed emer-

gency generators purchased using a Homeland Security grant at the radio station. Those backup generators will be installed at the church.

The county will cover the cost to install the backup generators using funds budgeted for a public safety radio infrastructure project, Cataline said. He noted that Pastor John Beck and the church congregation were on board. The station plays Christian music and broadcasts Beck's sermons from the prior week.

“They wanted to make sure we weren't going to come in and just hijack their radio station, which, I assured them, that's not our goal here,” Cataline said. “We wanted a partnership with them and use it as an emergency resource, and they understand the community outreach and the importance of that.”