

Project to mark farms for first responders

By Sarah Sobanski

Scott Trudeau initiated Farm 911 The Emily Project after his seven-year-old daughter Emily Trudeau was killed in an August 2014 farm accident.

Emergency services attending the scene missed the Trudeau farm and had to be flagged down by Emily's mother, Angela.

“There was no sign, no 9-1-1 marker at the farm entrance and it was very concerning to Scott,” Resi Walt, members services representative for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture explained at Hastings Highlands council June 8. “[He] asked us to address the issue of farm signs at field entrances.”

The project would place 9-1-1 markers at entrances of hard-to-find properties such as hunting camps and easy-to-miss trails such as farm fields without identifying buildings. The co-ordinates of these signs would be entered into emergency service databases.

“Normally, you have an entrance permit and a sign assigned to that property? That location is GIS entered into the emergency response database so then it becomes a concrete location,” said Walt who's also a member of the project's committee.

She added, “We believe whether the property is a hunting property, a wood lot, a sugar bush, an ATV trail or a farm ? having a location that is GIS entered seems to make common sense. In any emergency situation time is crucial and 9-1-1 signs ensure proper response co-ordinates.”

Walt suggested the co-ordinates would be easier for emergency services to use than GPS co-ordinates. Cellular reception in Hastings and surrounding area can be spotty, and GPS can be inaccurate, hampering the speed of first responders.

“We still feel that a sign in the ground is the most concrete form of a location.”

The project's committee joins representatives from federations of agriculture for Hastings, Lennox and Addington, Northumberland and Prince Edward counties.

It's researched with stakeholders in the four counties as well as emergency services, GIS analysts, 9-1-1 co-ordinators and fire services.

As the committee prepares to launch the project later this year, it's begun visiting municipal councils within each county for their support.

“We have had amazing support from everyone,” said Walt naming local MPs, MPPs, fire chiefs, and community safety organizations.

A list of project goals was provided at the project's delegation to Hastings Highlands council June 8. It included unifying a system for 9-1-1 signage across its four counties, persuading municipalities to offer the signs as a service to the community, encouraging rural landowners to use the service, establishing partnership with local agribusinesses and developing resources to teach property owners how to contact emergency services efficiently.

“Many are unaware that you can place a 9-1-1 sign at an entrance that does not have a building,” said Walt, noting research surveys found many unmarked entrances within surrounding municipalities. Some farmers had as many as 10 unmarked entrances. “We're just getting into the busy farm season with many farmers on the land. There's not really a location we can address for where they are.”

She added, “Our goal is as a committee is to make aware to farmers and rural landowners that 9-1-1 signs are available and they should take advantage of the fact that once they are there, established and uploaded to the system those GIS co-ordinates become a permanent part of the emergency response system.”

The project will launch at the Hastings County Plowing Match and Farm Show Aug. 23. Walt estimated that sign costs would vary across municipalities with the time of municipal staff to do site checks. The estimated value of the sign itself is around \$25.

“What's the cost of a little sign if you're going to get an emergency vehicle where your tractor has tipped over in a field somewhere. You need them now. You don't want to watch them drive by on the road not knowing where you are when minutes count,” said Mayor Vivian Bloom. “I think it's a wonderful initiative.”