



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager

DATE: January 9, 2018

SUBJECT: Purchase of Knox Box Equipment

The purpose of this memo is to provide background information about the Knox box program and the emergent need to procure replacement equipment. Staff will be bringing forward for Council consideration a request to ratify the procurement as soon as practicable in February 2018.

High-occupancy and commercial buildings are required by City Code Chapter 25-12, Article 7 (Fire Code) to supply a lockbox on the exterior of the building to secure keys and/or access cards. This system provides first responders with immediate access to the property in the event of an emergency, eliminating the need to force entry into locked doors or gates and reducing property damage. The Knox Company supplies the lockboxes, which are opened with a master key that is kept on each fire and emergency medical response vehicle in Travis County.

We recently learned that the security of the local Knox key system was compromised. Consequently, the Austin Fire Department (AFD) will be initiating a phased procurement process to replace and upgrade the system. Phase I procurement focuses on issuing new master keys, replacing the lock cylinders on the key retention boxes on AFD and EMS vehicles, installing key retention boxes on several vehicles that do not currently have them, and replacing the lock cylinders on all Knox boxes at over 6,000 building locations across the city of Austin. AFD and EMS will also implement a new protocol to restrict access to the keys and enhance their overall security. It is not currently proposed to change the locks of Knox key-operated gates and padlocks, of which there are about 17,500 across the county. The estimated cost for Phase I of the project is \$300,000 and project completion will take several months. This includes AFD personnel replacing the lock cylinders at no additional cost.

AFD is notifying building owners and informing them that they have the option to have their keys and/or access cards returned to them during the rekeying process. This means that emergency responders may not have easy access to their building. In those instances, AFD and Austin-Travis County EMS will still be able to provide full fire and medical response in an emergency.

The process of changing the lock box cylinders, which is anticipated to start shortly, will provide an opportunity to upgrade a 34-year-old system and to make sure all keys kept inside Knox

boxes located on buildings are current. The proposed security protocol for the rekeyed Knox boxes will include an enhanced routine reporting process, so that the new and old master keys on AFD and EMS vehicles are accounted for on a daily basis. The old master keys will remain in operation to allow AFD, EMS and Travis County Emergency Service Districts to continue to access gated and padlocked areas, as well as properties outside of the city of Austin.

Phase I addresses the immediate issues associated with Knox box key security at building locations; however, it does not completely address key security on AFD and EMS vehicles. Phase II will include the replacement of the key retention devices onboard AFD and EMS vehicles. The latest version of Knox box key retention devices includes wireless capabilities so the ability to change security codes can occur from a single central location. The new retention devices will also have the capability to store two master keys.

Staff is planning Phase II for the FY2019/FY2020 timeframe. The estimated project cost for this phase is \$1.5 million and will require considerable support from the Wireless Office to install the equipment on City vehicles. More information regarding Phase II of the project, including a timeline, will be provided with the request for Council action of this item.

Please contact me (512.974.2200), AFD Chief of Staff Tom Dodds (512.974.0132), or Assistant Chief Aaron Woolverton (512.974.0147) if you have any questions.

cc: Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager

Greg Canally, Interim Chief Financial Officer

Ray Baray, Chief of Staff

Rhoda Mae Kerr, Fire Chief

Ernesto Rodriguez, ATCEMS Chief

James Scarboro, Procurement Officer

Doug Matthews, Chief Communications Director

David Green, Public Information & Marketing Corporate Manager