

**THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING
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For more information, contact:

Nancy C. Lineman

Chief, Community Outreach and Media Relations

The Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning

301/495-4609

nancy.lineman@mncppc.org <<mailto:nancy.lineman@mncppc.org>>

PARK AND PLANNING TO ALTER TRAIL PHONE PROGRAM

SILVER SPRING, MD - The Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning announced today that technicians will remove four unreliable emergency trail phones over the coming weeks located on the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail in Aspen Hill. New solar-powered, wireless emergency call boxes that may be more reliable will replace the phones on a test basis.

By December, one solar-powered wireless emergency call box will be placed along the trail. The call boxes boast a weather-proof and vandal-resistant design. Like the old emergency phones, the new call box will be set up to ring directly into the park police dispatch center.

If the technology proves successful, department officials may request funding from the County Council to place additional call boxes on other trails within the county. The department currently maintains more than 200 miles of trails in Montgomery County.

New York's Central Park and Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Bridge are among other locations that already have installed the call box technology.

The original emergency phones were installed following the 2001 murder of a jogger on the trail.

The department partnered with the Montgomery County Road Runners Club, the Parks Foundation and local law enforcement agencies to raise money to install the phones. However, their reliability has been questionable due to vandalism, weather problems, wiring issues and difficulties with the locations of the phones.

Since their installation in 2002, the Commission has spent upwards of \$20,000 on repairing and replacing the phones and addressing problems with wiring. No emergency calls have ever been received by the dispatch center from the emergency phones.

“We certainly don’t want to give our trail users a false sense of security,” said Montgomery County Planning Board Chairman Derick Berlage. “We want to try again with better technology, but we always encourage trail users to bring cell phones with them in case there is an emergency.”

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