

Mountain COG in a buying mood

■ The organization's municipalities recently bought a camera that inspects the inside of sewer lines. Its director said money is available for more joint purchases.

By **JIM DINO**

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The purpose of a council of governments is to bring an area's elected officials together to communicate with each other, and possibly work together on common problems.

Members of the Mountain Council of Governments (M-COG) do that, and will probably do it more as time goes on and municipal problems increase.

For the last few years, members of the M-COG have been jointly purchasing items like road salt and fuel oil.

But in the future, they may be sharing police services, or building inspection services.

The local group recently bought its first piece of common equipment, a camera that goes into sewer lines to determine their condition.

M-COG Director Dan Guydish said the camera was purchased partially with a state grant, with seven municipalities sharing the rest of its cost.

Already, the camera has saved two of its co-owners a lot of money.

"I know the Hazleton Area School District has saved at least \$4,000 on one problem it had," Guydish said. "Hazle Township also recently had a

problem, and it saved them, I'm told, thousands of dollars.

"The buying and sharing of equipment – over the long run – can save municipalities a lot of money."

And there are more benefits than money, Guydish said.

"Hazle Township personnel found some features of the camera we didn't know about," he said. "They are going to do a training session on what they've learned about the camera. Each municipality can send a representative, who could then train the rest (from that municipality)."

Guydish is trying to convince M-COG members to jointly purchase a piece of equipment called the "asphalt zipper." The machine cuts worn asphalt off the top of a street, grinds it up, and produces a dirt-asphalt aggregate base that can be used underneath the new coating of asphalt when repaving a street.

The reason Guydish is pushing the purchase of the machine is that state grants for such joint purchases were never more numerous.

And the machine works well, according to Pittston City Manager Greg Gulick, who used it when he was city manager in Nanticoke.

"It makes such a good base that it makes the road last longer," Gulick said.

Guydish learned that fact at the recent Pennsylvania Council of Governments conference, which he attended with M-COG Chairman Joseph Yannuzzi in suburban Pittsburgh. The conference offered sem-

inars on the joint purchase of road materials, office supplies – and even health care.

"I also learned we could get a circuit rider – a person who helps several municipalities – to help with such projects as grant writing, parks and recreation, and cable television contracts," Guydish said.

He also mentioned a number of services that are available from the Pennsylvania Correctional Institutes Association – products made by inmates.

"They have a furniture-repair service," Yannuzzi said. "A few years ago, we sent out the desks and chairs from Hazleton City Council, and they refinished them. They did a good job."

Guydish said the state's long-standing "piggybacking" program to purchase such big-ticket items as police cars still exists, and has been renamed "Costars." This program also offers surplus state items.

The state program for surplus federal property is also still in existence. "It's surplus property and new products, mostly for law enforcement," Guydish said.

In addition, the Pennsylvania Local Government Investment Trust provides free checking and low-interest loans to governmental entities.

On the Net:
Pennsylvania Correctional Institutes Association: www.pci.state.pa.us
Costars: www.dgs.state.pa.us/costars



JIM DINO/Standard-Speaker

A sewer camera that was purchased by six members of the Mountain Council of Governments sits on the bumper of this vehicle, a special truck donated for the project by the City of Hazleton. From left are Robert Dougherty, the city's public works director; Alan Wusfus of the City Engineer's Office; Dan Guydish, M-COG executive director, and Hazleton Councilman Joseph Yannuzzi, M-COG chairman.