

## **Government Emergency Telephone System (GETS) Program**

The Federal Government has a program entitled, Government Emergency Telephone System (GETS) cards. The following information was provided by the GETS Program Administrator:

GETS provides priority handling of phone calls placed over the public phone system via an universal access phone number and a PIN which identifies the caller. GETS is simply a calling card and is used like commercial calling cards.

Each GETS user must be a person with a bona fide role supporting a government-sponsored national security or emergency preparedness / response mission. GETS cards are to be used by individuals who "run towards danger" (to use words describing those we lost on 9/11 in NYC) and by people responsible for continuity of government and infrastructure, etc., as described on the GETS website (<http://gets.ncs.gov/>).

GETS should be used only during emergencies when calls cannot be completed by your normal calling methods due to network congestion. However, we encourage GETS cardholders to make periodic test calls to maintain familiarity by calling the test number, 703-818-3924.

There is no sign-up fee or monthly service charge, just a typical \$0.15/minute usage charge when calls are made. Other charges may be involved for operator-assisted calls, international calls, etc.

Usage costs for state and local government cardholders must be paid by the cardholder's organization. This is accomplished by setting up a Program Designator Code (a 'billing account') as described on the GETS website. Note that GETS normally does not bill state and local organizations if their usage is below a modest threshold since the cost of billing exceeds the proceeds received. However, they reserve the right to request payment for all usage if they determine an organization's GETS calling cards have been used for personal or non-emergency calls.

The GETS system records, the originating and destination phone number, and the duration for every call made so they can monitor for performance and abuse.

Please visit GETS website at <http://gets.ncs.gov>.

The Office of Administration, specifically the Continuity of Government (CoG) Office, has become the Program Designator for all but three State agencies (The Pennsylvania State Police, Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency currently have their own designators). In order words, we will be the conduit for State agencies to receive GETS cards. We will also have access to the Federal system that tracks card usage.

Although the information above describes a cost for use, the GETS Program, although being in place for a number of years, has not ever billed a State or local government for card usage. Their rationale has been that the cost associated with billing is higher than what the actual bills have been. It, however, does not mean

that they will not ever bill; and therefore, if they do, the Office of Administration will set up the method to recover the costs from the agencies.

This is a valuable program, and we encourage all agencies to take advantage of this opportunity.

If you are interested in participating, please (following the guidelines described above for who should have a card), identify the number and position title of staff within your agency that you would like to have a card issued to and submit them to the Continuity of Government e-mail account at [ra-continuityofgovernment@state.pa.us](mailto:ra-continuityofgovernment@state.pa.us).