



The Betrayal of New York's Bravest

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Your Radio Stories

Here are stories you have submitted thus far...(submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!)

From Victoria, British Columbia, Canada:

In 2003 Police, Fire, Ambulance, and Transit in the Victoria area (BC Canada) went to a Motorola Digital radio system. The system was designed, implemented and maintained by a corporation called Capital Region Emergency Services Telecommunications (CREST). The corporation included representatives from the local municipalities, Provincial government, Povincial Ambulance Service, BC Transit and the CRD.

From the outset users reported problems with "bonking", unheard transmissions and garbled transmissions. The downtown core reported the most problems due to the amount of buildings and heavier call load. It became so bad that the Presidents of the Victoria Fire and Police unions sent memorandums to the Capital Region Emergency Services Telecommunications (CREST) putting them on notice that they considered the system a threat to the safety of their members.

Some upgrades to the system were made but the problems continued and in fact became worse as reported by the users.

The frequency used by CREST (VHF 136-174 Mhz) is a commercial band of channels. These channels, unlike the 800 Mhz, are congested with interference which will increase as time goes on. So in our case we aren't just dealing with the problems inherent in the Motorola Digital systems on 800 Mhz, we are also dealing with a frequency which does not give us priority.

The system shut down completely in 2003 and again on October 27th 2005. We also know, as does the CREST board, that in the event of an area wide disaster or critical incident the system will not tolerate the volume of radio traffic and there will be no emergency services comms. This is highly ironic in that the system was put in place to address the need for a system which would allow all the jurisdictions to communicate during an area wide incident. When the system is most needed it will fail.

The CREST corporation is now in a financial deficit and will have no funds available for several months and possibly years.

Also, given the frequencies we operate on and the experiences of places like Miami and Philadelphia it would be fiscally irresponsible to pour more of the tax payers' money into an unfixable system.

We have close calls on a daily basis where officers are calling for cover or help and are not being heard.

On one occassion officers called for assistance multiple times while fighting with a male who had slashed himself and was covered in blood. The male managed to grab the beanbag shotgun from one of the officers. After many failed attempts on the radio one of the officers called 911 on her personal cel phone. The cel phone worked in the building. This happened two years ago. Nothing was done to improve coverage in the building which is notorious for calls involving violent and sometimes armed persons. The problem remains to this day.

On another occassion one of our Sgt.'s made multiple calls for help while he wrestled with a violent mentally deranged person. He was finally able to subdue the suspect.

Also on a daily basis members tell me that they have told their spouses that should they be hurt or killed as a result of the radio system that they should retain a lawyer to pursue CREST and Motorola.

Some Police and Fire officials are supportive however, due to the political backdrop there is a limited amount they can do.

CREST's response to the unions has been a "quit your whining" attitude with an underlying hostility. CREST has conducted an independent review which downplays the concerns of the users and states that due to financial issues they will be "unable to do anything any time soon".

All we can do is pray that something is done before one of our members is hurt or killed. The fact that it has already happened elsewhere doesn't seem to bother those who continue to defend the system.

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From Monroe County, Michigan:

Please let me start out by saying this story that I am about to tell you will be a subject of many newscast in the near future. I do not want my name or any thing about my family released to the media or any other information given out in any way shape or form. I am a paid public safety official from Monroe Michigan 40 miles south of Detroit.

America's Most Wanted did a story on fire and police public safety radios about 6 months ago and how bad they are, check it out. Monroe County, Michigan just put these radios into service. And we have had trouble ever since, sometimes fire and police not being able to talk to their dispatch or each other in emergencies.

They have spent close to 12 million on this system, it was only going to cost 9 million, and it does not work. And I believe it will cost thousands more to even come close to being right. I have been told not to talk about how I feel about this system, last time I checked there are people dying in Iraq so that I can have that freedom, and I spent 6 years in the USMC protecting that right also. I have done many hours of research on the 800MHz radio system, I have many news articles from all over the county of how this system is failing, and I have talked to the FCC about this system;

One of the biggest problems I have is if a firefighter is at home and they get dispatched to a call by their pager and it tells them what to respond to, say domestic violence call. When they're in their vehicle and respond with lights and sirens while in route they hear nothing, they are literally blind, so if the officer gets on scene and yells for help over the 800MHz radio to stay away, for any reason, they cannot hear that.

Or if the fire officer cancels the call they do not hear that cancellation, where before they could hear that cancellation. The state of Michigan came in and said you cannot simulcast over the 800MHz radios, the day they did that they put all 600 Monroe County firefighters in the blind. None of these issues were ever addressed when the system was being installed no one ask question to Motorola. They installed the system and had their own engineers checking the installation themselves, no outside consultant or third party was asked to verify the installation.

No consultant or third party was even asked if this system worked. If that one issue would have been addressed then, I don't think I would be writing you now. No consultant was hired before or during the installation of this system and even when the safety issues started to arise.

And now the FCC has ordered a re-band on this 800MHz system.

In the late 1990's, police and fire agencies started to notice interference on their radio channels from such commercial users as Nextel. In response, the Federal Communications Commission decided last year to authorize a nationwide swap in which public safety frequencies would move to the lower end of the 800-megahertz band and commercial users would move to the higher end. This three-year, \$4.9 billion project began June 27 and will be paid for by Nextel.

Fairfax has the distinction of being in the first stage and will begin negotiating with Nextel within weeks. The early changeover date means the county is at risk of falling out of step with its neighbors, which worries James Wadsworth, manager of the Fairfax County Radio Services Center:

After meeting last month with representatives of Nextel, the FCC and the Transition Administrator, Wadsworth was even more worried.

"They said there would be no interruption of service," he recalled. "And I said, 'Okay. Why are you only talking to Fairfax in this phase? Because all the other jurisdictions would be affected when we change.' And they didn't have an answer."

Monroe county leaders don't even know about this re-banding it would seem to me if you ask the taxpayers to help pay for such a system you would make sure you did your homework on that 9-12 million dollar system and find out what it entails, or if your going to have any bugs in it.

Why did the FCC order a reconfiguration of the 800 MHz band?

Public safety radio systems, such as those used by police, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians and other systems operating at 806-824 MHz/851-869 MHz, commonly known as "the 800 MHz band", have been experiencing increasing levels of interference from commercial wireless carriers operating in the same or adjacent spectrum bands. This problem has been exacerbated because, during the past several years, 800 MHz public safety radio systems have become more widespread and 800 MHz commercial wireless systems have proliferated, both in terms of transmitter sites and subscribers. Consequently, public safety systems began to encounter pockets of "dead zones" or have otherwise suffered from interference within their coverage areas. The FCC ordered the reconfiguration of the 800 MHz band to avoid a potentially life-threatening problem where public safety communications equipment may be rendered inoperable.

I have gone to our leaders in the fire service and to our County Commissioner in Monroe, like many other in the fire and police service in Monroe County with our safety concerns. They all say we are going to have problems with the new 800MHz system until the bugs are worked out of it. 8 months have passed since then. And if you check this out it is happening all over the country, fire and police are stepping up and saying this 800MHz radio system is not working. We are afraid someone is going to die before some one finally listens to us. When someone is seriously hurt or worse killed because of this new 9-12 million dollar radio system that bug statement may come back to haunt them. I am just a public safety official, but it would seem to me if you pay 9-12 million for a radio system, wouldn't you want that system to work immediately? The bugs better be gone

before you pay 9-12 million dollars for that system. Tell that to Donald Trump after he just paid 9-12 million for that product. "You're Fired!" sounds like a good statement.

If you decide to do a story on this new 800MHz radio system I would like to talk to some one first and show you all the information I have on how this system has failed in protecting the public safety personnel, that protects and serves this country. If not, do your own investigation, check out all over the country how this is becoming an epidemic with this 800MHz system. I am all for something if it is going to work but if you have so much evidence that it does not would anybody want it? Look at the big three if they have a safety problem with one of their vehicles don't they usually do a recall? Just in what I have researched on this 800MHz radio system, it would seem there is a huge safety issue with this radio system. We just need the company and the leaders that back this system to admit it does not work, say we tried, but we failed before some one is killed, and it is just a matter of time.

It seems to me after 9/11, and all the support the firefighters and police officers received during this time of tragedy, this issue on bad radios in the public safety arena should stop. Communication problems was a big issue during 9-11, what happen to all that support for the fire and police, we need it more now than ever before because of these safety issues with this 800MHz radio system. We need to make the Fire officials, Police leaders and political officials that do not want to deal with these fire and police radio safety issues accountable. And find out why there is so much support for a system that has so much evidence of failure.

Please if you do nothing about my story do an investigation on your own investigate this 800MHz public safety radio system. Come to my town or for that matter any town in America with this 800MHz radio system. And ask the firefighters that are going into harms way, ask the police officers that answers calls shots fired if they feel safe with this system. Find out why so many of our leaders in our communities, government, and public safety are looking the other way. When there are so many reports of safety problems with this system, I guarantee you will have a story that will shock many. We have to be committed in protecting the ones that protect us; it is everyone's responsibility.

Our communications are mission-critical. Our communications need to work 100 per cent of the time, "Anything less is unacceptable. The lives of not only our fire fighters, but also the public depend on it."

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From DelawareOnline.com:

Two DE Firefighters Trapped When Radios Fail

TERRI SANGINITI and DENNIS THOMPSON Jr. DelawareOnline.com

Two Claymont firefighters were stranded in the basement of a burning house early Wednesday when the state's 800-megahertz radio system failed, fire company officials said.

Two other firefighters found their exit cut off by fire and were unable to call for hoses because the radios did not work, said Deputy Chief Jack Anderson, the officer in charge of the scene. Altogether, four firefighters were injured in the incident.

"This could have potentially been a deadly mistake," fire company spokes- man Jacob Morente said. "There was no communication inside or outside, and the problem is you can't ask for help."

State officials said a blown circuit breaker in a radio signal booster caused the failure, which left firefighters battling a blaze in the 1000 block of Lawndale Road in Longview Farms without working radios to communicate with one another or fireboard dispatchers.

At one point, firefighters sent an emergency evacuation alert because firefighters were trapped -- a warning that none of the firefighters inside the house heard.

"When we were conveying back there's a possibility that firefighters were trapped, we heard them, but they couldn't hear us," said Dave Roberts, the county's emergency services assistant manager. "It was very frustrating."

Officials said the firefighters were trapped for two or three minutes.

Emergency workers have long complained about the state's \$50 million 800-megahertz system, a network of computerized radios and signal towers that went online in 1999. Police and firefighters have said they have trouble communicating in dead zones around the state and inside large buildings with thick walls. The Legislature recently approved spending an additional \$4.3 million for repairs that would include the Claymont area.

State technicians traced the problem to a circuit breaker in a signal booster atop the Holiday Inn Select on Naamans Road. The signal booster was added about a year ago after problems with the 800-megahertz system emerged, officials said.

State officials said the equipment, which is used to boost radio signals in the Claymont vicinity from a full radio site on I-95 at Talley Ville, does not have an alarm to alert anyone if the circuit breaker trips.

"This may have occurred during Monday evening's storm," said Bob Pederson, state Division of Communications

manager. "That particular piece of equipment is not alarmed, so no one knows until a user reports it."

Pederson could not say whether the circuit breaker had been off longer than that.

"By the time we find there's a problem, it doesn't help us," said Morente, the fire company spokesman. "We have to maintain everything in a state of readiness always."

The state switched to the 800-megahertz system because it offered greater range and let workers with different agencies talk to one another at the same time during the same emergency.

Four firefighters suffered injuries, none of them life-threatening. Three were treated at Wilmington Hospital and released.

Morente said Claymont firefighter Tom Stratton dislocated his right shoulder and sprained his wrist when he fell through the first floor and into the basement. Firefighter Duane Reeder refused medical treatment after suffering bumps and bruises when he fell through while trying to pull Stratton to safety.

Firefighter Jackie Jenkins was treated for heat exhaustion, while John Perry suffered first- and second-degree burns to his legs through his fire gear, Morente said.

"They were very lucky," said Roberts, the county emergency services official. "We've been saying all along we hope somebody isn't hurt before this system's fixed."

Anderson, the deputy chief, said the radios also worked sporadically during a March fire in a Knollwood row house that claimed the lives of two residents.

"One minute you could hear everything, the next minute you couldn't," he said.

Radio problems in that fire were far less severe and played no role in the victims' deaths, Morente said. Firefighters knew the victims were trapped ahead of time and found their bodies quickly, Morente said.

Claymont fire officials will consider switching to their old radios because of the latest problem, deputy chief Anderson said. They will meet in the coming days to look for immediate fixes, he said.

Morente said when firefighters responded to the 12:16 a.m. call Wednesday, heavy fire lit up the home's first floor. The home was not occupied.

Firefighter Jimmy Dugan and Reeder manned the first hose into the burning house.

"We had fire rolling over our heads," Dugan said. "We had to crawl in under the fire and start knocking it down. Visibility was zero."

The hallway floor felt unstable, so the men held back until Reeder noticed a flashlight beam flitting back and forth through a hole in the floor, Dugan said.

The beam came from Stratton, who had fallen through the floor into the basement and was unable to call for help with his radio.

Reeder crawled forward on his stomach to try to pull Stratton up, Dugan said. Instead, the floor gave way and Reeder fell in the basement.

"At that point, I'm freaking out because the way the floor was burned out, you assume the fire is down in the basement," Dugan said. "I figured they were down there burning."

Dugan said he shouted to Capt. Donna Brooks, who was behind him that two firefighters were down. "She started calling on her radio to tell them to bring a ladder and some more manpower to try and get them up out of the basement," Dugan said.

Brooks' radio would not work, so she ran outside to get help.

Deputy chief Anderson, who was at a command center outside the house, said he did not know that anyone was in trouble until he heard two sets of garbled words over the airwaves: "Lawndale" and "evacuate the structure."

"We had no idea they even called for the alert," Anderson said. "We were looking at each other out front saying, 'What the hell is going on?' " No one on the scene got the evacuation notice, Anderson said. The firefighters remained at their posts, unaware others were trapped.

Anderson said he had to use runners to relay basic information to crews, such as where to point their hoses and provide ventilation. That is how he found out about the trapped men.

"You find out you have guys down, you have no idea how long they've been down or where they're at, you can't talk to them at all," Anderson said.

An assistant chief in the back of the house had tried several times to call Anderson and tell him about the men. "He was maybe 150 feet away from me, 200 feet, and I couldn't hear him over the radio, Anderson said.

Dugan said he ran outside and grabbed a ladder. He and some other firefighters pulled Stratton and Reeder to

safety.

It took firefighters from Claymont and Brandywine hundred fire companies, and companies from Linwood and Ogden, Pa., 45 minutes to bring the fire under control.

The State Fire Marshal's Office said the fire was sparked by a malfunction in an electrical wire in the basement ceiling and caused an estimated \$170,000 in damages.

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From Canada:

Hello, my name is Joe Miller and I represent my company Vital Alert Communication Inc. I am in the business of "saving lives". My company has developed technology that will help save lives and make the world a safer place.

The technology is an award winning, digital, wireless, emergency broadcast network, co-developed by the United States and Canadian governments. It was initially developed for underground mining - to evacuate people and provide them with early warning and post disaster information - the network has the ability to propagate the earth for several miles.

I have observed a number of disastrous events where this technology could have been applied: airlines, subways, mining, marine, urban and skyscrapers, to name but a few.

I personally quoted The World Trade Center in 1993 after the first terrorist attack to outfit the Center with a wireless emergency evacuation and warning system. The World Trade Center did not install a warning system, but rather they outfitted people on each floor with colored hats and whistles.

On 9/11/01 all communications were lost as a result of the horrific attack. Our technology could have been utilized as the backup "failsafe" emergency evacuation and warning system.

With the declining enrollment of rescue workers, (our frontline defense for all emergency situations) those that put their lives on the frontline deserve the best technology available. As each day passes, I personally have a hard time knowing that I have the technology in my possession that could help save and protect emergency personnel and all people.

The technology has not been adopted as of yet, but should be, to protect people through emergency preparedness.

I ask for your help to take my technology to market for all rescue workers. We must take action. Your participation and assistance in getting this technology to market would be beneficial and further reinforce your concern for human life, and would insure that this technology would get to market on the scale that is required.

In closing, it is up to us as people to try to change and take some responsibility to protect things we take for granted. In a world that seems more hung up on making profits for shareholders than protecting human lives, I still cannot understand this shortsightedness. I hope that some day my efforts will not have been in vain. If corporate America gives back, and if we all do our part, we will have helped and contributed in some way, not only to our own safety, but the safety and protection of others.

I continue to be hopeful in my belief that someday, someone will hear what I am saying and actually take this technology and its products to the level that is needed immediately!

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From Somewhere in the US:

Get involved with your local government BEFORE they make a monumental mistake and buy a radio system that DOESN'T WORK and puts first responder's lives at risk. As an amateur radio operator and an active local disaster volunteer, I make it my business to keep our elected officials informed on how this stuff really works.

It is our job as radio technicians, amateur radio operators, and communications professionals to keep the information flowing. A city, county or state SHOULD NEVER be allowed to purchase radio systems to be relied upon by first responders based solely on information provided by radio equipment salesman. You wouldn't take the word of a car salesman on reliability or safety, so why should the buying process be any different here.

Most major communities have amateur radio organizations who will be glad to offer FREE consulting services to our communities. Unlike your local Motorola dealer, we CANNOT receive compensation for what we do (by FCC rules) and therefore we can give unbiased information. Contact us, we want to help you so you can continue to do your job helping us the citizens.

We also must take head on the blatant misinformation being spread that Project 25 Digital radio is the interoperability "end all" solution when in fact, it is just another reason for radio equipment manufacturer's to sell more expensive radios that don't work and thus require us to shell out more bucks to fix the bugs. We must inform our elected officials that buying into proprietary networks such as Motorola Smartnet/Smartzone or MA/COM ProVoice trunking limits the interagency interoperability to only those who can afford the OUTRAGEOUSLY priced subscriber units. Open standards and closed networks don't mix.

How many more billions are wasted and how many more lives are being put at risk just to line the pockets of a few?

Common sense solutions are out there and aren't as expensive nor complex as Mr. Radio Salesman tells you they are.

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From the Oakland Fire Department:

800 mega hertz trunked radios in the Oakland Fire Dept are terrible. When 1 radio is transmitting no other radio in the city can transmit on that channel. They are no good in BART tunnels and questionable at best in high rise buildings. There are many dead spots in the city with no reception. The radios are too complicated and have too many features that require numerous intricate steps to access. This is not appropriate for emergency operations. The old VHF radios were much better and much simpler. Also, a horrendous problem in the OFD is that too few members are handie-talkie equipped. Only chiefs, co. officers, and LCC's are HT equipped. It is an abysmal state of affairs that so many members are operating on the fireground without such a basic and vital piece of safety equipment!

Thanks for all of your good works.

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From Philadelphia:

Philadelphia firefighters are battling a new threat to public safety: your cell phone.

In some of the city's most heavily populated neighborhoods - Center City, Grays Ferry and University City - cell-phone signals have blocked radio communication for firefighters at the scene of fires, department officials confirm.

No firefighter has been injured as a result of radio problems, but union representatives for firefighters say the risks are too great.

A blocked radio signal, which makes a "bonking" sound, "is the sound of death," said David Kearney, a Philadelphia paramedic and officer for Local 22 of the International Association of Fire Fighters.

Interference from cell phones on the 800-megahertz (MHz) band of the radio-frequency spectrum is a problem confronting firefighters, police, and emergency medical workers across the country.

Fire and police units in Philadelphia suburbs such as Upper Merion and East Norriton have complained of cell-phone interference. In New Jersey, state police have received reports of interruptions in every part of the state.

Last month, the Federal Communications Commission proposed moving all cell-phone carriers to one end of the 800-MHz band and all public-safety users to the other.

But any agreement would need the approval of Nextel Communications Inc. of Reston, Va., the largest commercial user of frequencies in the 800-MHz range. The plan calls for Nextel to acquire a new band of spectrum worth \$4.8 billion. In return, the company would have to pay to reconfigure public-safety signals in the 800-MHz range.

Nextel is reviewing the FCC proposal, said Leigh Horner, a company spokeswoman.

Any plan, however, would take up to three years to put in place. In the meantime, Philadelphia firefighters have filed a steady number of complaints about interference.

At a house fire in Grays Ferry on June 27, for example, a fire chief who could not get through to crews via radio had to resort to yelling commands to firefighters inside, eyewitnesses said.

Lloyd Ayers, the city's acting fire commissioner, said his department was aware of the interference problems and was working with cell-phone carriers to find solutions.

"It's a big concern," Ayers said. "We're doing what we can to assure we have a remedy for this."

The Fire Department's Motorola 800-MHz radio system was installed in October 2002, replacing an outdated 150-MHz network. Both the Fire and Police Departments are hooked up to the Motorola system, which cost the city \$54 million.

Cell-phone interference was not a problem with the old system because there were no cell-phone carriers operating on the 150-MHz band. But with the 800-MHz band, cell-phone signals are bumping up against public-safety channels.

City and fire officials say Nextel and Cingular Wireless are the suspected culprits. The city has hired technical experts to verify signal interference and to pinpoint which cell-phone carrier could be to blame.

Spokeswomen for Cingular and Nextel said their companies were cooperating with city officials.

Part of the problem is that city officials do not know where cell-phone towers are located, and companies hold that information close to the vest.

As a result, a firefighter making a call at an 850-MHz frequency might unknowingly be standing under a cell-phone antenna transmitting at 851 MHz. One signal could block the other.

Temporary fixes - such as adjusting frequencies or realigning towers - are neither reliable nor permanent, said Robert Gurss, director of legal affairs for the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials.

"Even if you know how to fix it, you can't go through that process every time you have an interference problem," Gurss said. "It's a dangerous approach. You're chasing problems after they occur, and one of these days someone's going to die as a result."

Kearney, of the firefighters' union, said cell-phone interference is just one of many problems that first responders have found with the city's new radio system.

Kearney, who is tracking radio complaints for Local 22, said members had reported losing signals inside high-rises, warehouses, tunnels, elevators and basements. Communication into deep or dense sites such as Center City towers was a problem with the old radio system, and Kearney said the new radios have not alleviated the situation.

At a three-alarm high-rise fire on June 28, 2003, at 1919 Chestnut St., Kearney said, commanders in the lobby lost touch with firefighters on upper floors. Kearney, who was on duty that night, said a runner had to be sent to the 29th floor to tell firefighters to switch to the department's old radio system, which was still effective inside the high-rise.

Fire officials said they suspected cell-phone interference may have played a role in lost communication that day.

John McFadden, the sales vice president for Motorola who handles the Philadelphia contract, said the emergency radio system covers 95 percent of the city.

He said such factors as the number of high-rise buildings in an area or the amount of metal in a structure can block a radio signal.

"There's no such thing as 100 percent radio coverage," McFadden said. "There are always going to be dead spots."

Philadelphia police have not reported the same interference trouble as fire units. One reason could be that police units can move around more readily to get out from a blocked signal, according to Charles Brennan, deputy police commissioner in charge of technology.

The Police Department, however, has had problems of its own. On three occasions - March 25, May 18 and Aug. 18 - the radio system was either shut down for a few seconds or failed to activate all channels, Brennan said.

Philip R. Goldsmith, Philadelphia's managing director, said the new radio system is better than the old, mismatched systems for police and fire. He said that, for the first time, fire and police units can talk directly on the same channels. Also, the new system provides more-thorough coverage of the city.

But Goldsmith said the city is holding Motorola responsible for determining why the system has been hampered by occasional glitches.

"We still know there's an issue and still know that Motorola cannot say with certainty, 'We found what is causing this, case closed.'

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From New York City:

*There are still problems with these radios, some of them are programmed wrong, they are being programmed for a 12.5 Khz channel spacing while a majority are programmed for 25 Khz channel spacing, I discovered one radio programmed that way, it was one of the chiefs involved with the early stages of the command post radio, it might have been *****'s radio but don't hold me to that, he then took it to the FDNY radio shop the next day and it was conveniently reprogrammed correctly by @@@@ while he was called away for a phone call.*

The radio was then brought back to me for testing and it was confirmed that it was reprogrammed for 25 Khz. What this can cause is a loss of communication in the radio programmed for 12.5 Khz channel spacing, because the receiver in the radio uses a narrow band pass filter and will clip the signal to the 12.5 Khz or not allow it to pass at all. Going the other way from 12.5 KHz radio to the 25 Khz radio the receive audio will sound low because it is at 1/2 the deviation of the radio's filter that it is programmed to use.

Also while I was in possession of, I believe it was seven XTS-3500™ @ radios, FDNY's to test with, I discovered not all the XTS-3500™ @ radios with the displays would decode and display the PPQ ID (that new signaling format from Motorola™ @), no matter what was changed in the XTS-3500™ programming software, nothing

would allow the radio to display and decode the ID, the only way that it could be done was reading a radio that did display the ID and program one that didn't display with it. Did you also know that this PPO ID is Motorola's [™] ® proprietary property and it will only pass through one of Motorola's [™] ® repeaters, locking the FDNY into buying only that repeater and that repeater is the Quantar [™] ® repeater. It has the capability of passing the digital PPO signal.

There is one other area of concern and that is that these radios are also being programmed for 2 watts instead of the full 4 watts they are capable of. Now this causes a big problem with in building penetration, like in a hi-rise. The answer to this question that I received was that they didn't want the radios to affect other fires that might be nearby. As a radio technician for some 24 years now and having set up my share of in-building repeaters for customers, there are some buildings that are constructed in such a way that a 4 watt portable could not even communicate to another one on the same floor or even one floor below it. If the nearby fires are going to be a big issue and concern then at least program the radios with the option of switching from 2 watts to 4 watts, This way if a fireman is in an emergency situation and gets no response on 2 watts maybe he will on 4 watts, all the buttons on the XTS-3500 [™] ® are programmable as to what function they do.

I have purchased your book and while I was reading it, it reminded me of the problems that I had discovered while testing them for the FDNY. I felt compelled to tell this to someone. I'm not saying any of this for fame or glory actually I would prefer just the opposite and remain totally anonymous since my job could be on the line for doing this and possibly other people's jobs too. However, I am concerned for the safety of the fire fighters using these crappy radios and the technology that has no place in fire fighting. Digital communications only works when you have a perfect world and a perfect signal.

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From New York City:

While not a firefighter, I have been close in monitoring many radio systems here in NYC. As an amateur radio operator and RACES radio officer (The Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service), I have a need to keep an ear on PD, FD, EMS, OEM communications in case the hams are needed to help out.

I was in the audience in February 2001 when Mr. Gregory (Assistant FDNY Commissioner for Communications Stephen Gregory) announced the new digital-capable radios (Motorola [™] ® XTS3500's [™] ®) to the Fire Bell Club in NYC. (The Fire Bell Club is the largest association for fire department supporters or buffs. Libraries, museums, financial support are maintained by the Fire Bell Club) I immediately commented that digital was a bad choice, but we were all assured by him that it was the next greatest thing to come down the road. He even showed a Motorola [™] ® promo/training video about this model radio.

In conducting a weekly ham radio net on shortwave and scanner listening in the NYC area since March 1992, we have many on-air and email participants from different agencies (including inside the FDNY and NYPD). Doubts and fears were mentioned many times in the Spring of 2001. Even after the radios were pulled back after the Queens Village incident (an FDNY firefighter was trapped in a basement when other firefighters in the building could not hear the seven mayday calls he made) in March, things were tenuous until an EMS department memo was forwarded to me talking about the testing of the radios in analog mode (FDNY was not buying analog models) for the South Bronx and Staten Island for July and early August of 2001. We were waiting to hear the results of that test when the WTC was attacked on 9/11/2001.

I believe that truth and openness is paramount when talking about communications systems since lives are in the balance. By having a substantial pool of people monitoring from their homes around the area, we can objectively evaluate and report on what works and what does not work. Without the taint of money, political appointments or jobs on the line, these volunteers (hams and scanner listeners) can help. Nothing is more important to them than to be a help, not a hindrance, to the public safety agencies.

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From Northern Illinois:

We had an 800mhz system where I work and our radio dealer sold the frequencies to Nextel which was a blessing. The system SUCKED!!! We also have a neighboring county in Iowa that switched all police, fire and ems to 800 mhz. They took all the VHF radios out of all vehicles. They have isolated themselves from the rest of their neighboring counties and state police. If they call a neighboring fire department, police or EMS from another county they have to run all communications through the dispatch center. Dispatchers have their hands full when the big one happens. The 800 mhz they are on is brand specific. You can't buy any other brand radios except for what the system is. They also at least once a month need the technicians out there because they hear the page on their 800mhz radios but not on the VHF pagers. They have have to page on 800mhz and link it through to VHF. If 800 mhz is so great then why do they have to link to VHF ?

I was at a training session awhile back and asked some of the firefighters from that area how they liked their 800 mhz system. One assistant chief told me to stay with VHF it works much better. Another firefighter told me it has its share of problems. Why spend big money on something that doesn't work 100%?? We wouldn't put up with buying a new car and having the transmission on it shift once in awhile!! If you think you need to go to 800 mhz leave your VHF radios in so you can talk to neighboring agencies. VHF works and is here to stay.

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From Philadelphia

As Philadelphia city officials try and correct their \$54 million public-safety radio system, they will tell you that no one has been hurt as a result of any problems with that system.

Leon Phipps's opinion on that subject is vastly different from the city's.

Phipps, a veteran Philadelphia firefighter for over twenty years, became trapped while battling a house fire on April 12 and believes he almost died because of problems with his Motorola ®™ radio.

Phipps suffered burns to his esophagus and lung damage, requiring an 11-day stay in intensive care, after his air tank ran out of air and his multiple calls for help, via his Motorola ®™ radio, were not heard or were heard in a garbled fashion.

While the Philadelphia City Council is about to conduct its second hearing about the complaints that have been received about the new Motorola ®™ radios, Fire Department officials are investigating what happened to Phipps, but the Commissioner Lloyd Ayers said an initial review showed "no problems with radio communications."

Councilman Frank Rizzo, who called for the hearing said, "This radio system is our police officers, and firefighters' lifeline. I don't think there is an issue more important than having this system working."

Two years ago, the city switched to a Motorola ®™ digital radio system that provided more channels and was to allow all city agencies to talk on the same frequencies during major emergencies. That radio model is the XTS 3500 ®™ digital radio, the same model which is at the center of the fire department radio controversy in New York City.

Firefighters in Philadelphia have filed a number of complaints about the Motorola ®™ system, over the past several months.

Already three times this year the police radios system has gone down for various periods of time. Firefighters have reported loss of reception and other problems at the scene of fires.

The city claims it is working with Motorola ®™ to resolve the problems with the system, which is now two years old. Philadelphia's Deputy Commissioner of Public Property was recently quoted as saying "You are going to find out things (about the system) as the system gets used."

Perhaps that is why pre-purchase testing and research and development are so important. In many cities all fire department equipment is tested before it is put into the hands of firefighters for use in the field.

Shortly after midnight on April 12, Ladder 24 in West Philadelphia responded to a house fire in the 900 block of North 66th Street.

Phipps went up to the second floor to search for anyone who might be trapped. While searching a rear bedroom and while crawling on the floor looking for victims, as firefighters are trained to do and as the thick smoke made it impossible for him to see more than a foot in front of him, Phipps reached the point where he believed the door was located.

Phipps could not find the opening for door because the door had blown shut. Phipps smashed a window, but the heat and smoke were too intense for him to use the window as an escape route. Phipps found himself without a way out.

Phipps broadcast, "I'm trapped!" and he screamed, "Help!" over his Motorola ®™ radio. He received no answer.

All the while the floor beneath Phipps was becoming hotter and he ultimately had to stand on a mattress to try and escape the heat coming from below.

Phipps broadcast again, "Ladder 24 search!" he yelled Phipps gave that message to let others know he, as the firefighter assigned to conduct the search of the upper floor, was trapped. Phipps then broadcast "I'm trapped in the back bedroom!" Again he received no response.

Phipps then pushed the emergency button on the top of his radio that is supposed to notify the fire dispatcher that there is an emergency situation with a firefighter who is in trouble. Pressing that button should have also opened the microphone for Phipps' radio so all other firefighters on the scene could have heard what was happening.

Phipps then broadcast via his Motorola ®™ radio "This is Ladder 24. I'm on the second-floor back bedroom. I'm trapped! I'm in deep trouble!" No one responded. No one heard.

As Phipps pressed the emergency button for the second time the alarm on his air tank sounded its own alarm, letting Phipps know he had no more than five minutes of air to reach safety.

Phipps, who by now as feeling dizzy, collapsed. That set off another alarm on the air tank which lets other firefighters know one their own was down. Luckily a firefighter on the first floor heard that alarm and came to Phipps' rescue.

The computer log of the data handled that night by fire department dispatchers, show one entry of an

emergency signal from Phipps' radio. Phipps swears he sent two such signals.

A Fire Department spokesperson says the department would review the radio transcripts from that night to see what might have been communicated by Phipps, however that department spokesman said a critique of the fire, conducted last spring did not reveal any radio problems.

Then Motorola ®™ notified the fire department on September 10th that the open microphone feature with the emergency button might not work in every case.

The XTS 3500 ®™ model radios were initially to be developed for the National Security Agency, according to a January 1999 Motorola ®™ press release. The radios were to have been operable in an encryption mode. In its September 10th communications to the fire department of Philadelphia, Motorola ®™ claims inadvertently putting the radio into the encryption mode would cause the emergency button to not work properly. According to a story in Newsday in February 2004, written by William Murphy, Motorola ®™ has announced the discontinuation of the XTS 3500 ®™ model radios.

The Vice President of Sales for Motorola ®™, John McFadden, was also quoted in a recent newspaper article that he was "not aware of any complaints about the radios from firefighters."

Mc Fadden did not mention that he had as late as last month, discussed the problems with that very radio model with executives of the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Association and had gone so far as to try and set up a private meeting with some selected Chiefs at the International Association of Fire Chiefs convention in New Orleans to discuss some of the problems with the FDNY radios, which are the same model carried by the police and firefighters in Philadelphia. As well, Mr. Mc Fadden has been contacted by a reporter from the Chicago Tribune who wrote a story about the problems encountered by firefighters in Chicago, where firefighters are using that same model, the Motorola ®™ XTS 3500 ®™.

McFadden claimed that cities have their own review systems and very rarely let the vendor know unless there's something wrong with the system. The XTS 3500 ®™ model Motorola ®™ radios have received complaints about not receiving messages and other problems in New York City, since those radios were first introduced to the FDNY in January of 2001. One fact that emerged from the New York City Council's hearings into the problems with the Motorola ®™ XTS 3500 ®™ radios was the complete lack of review the XTS 3500 ®™ radios. When that radio model was issued to the field in New York in March of 2001, it was pulled from service after less than one week had passed. The primary reason that radio model was pulled from service so quickly was because of unreceived messages, according to then Chief of the Department Nigro of the FDNY.

It was widely reported that Motorola ®™ worked for almost two years with the FDNY before the XTS 3500 ®™ model was found acceptable for use by the FDNY. Even after its re-issue the model XTS 3500 ®™ resulted in many complaints. One solution the FDNY and Motorola ®™ came up with for New York, was that the model of the XTS 3500 ®™ used by the FDNY was reprogrammed to only work as an analog radio and no longer as a digital model. Philadelphia's firefighters still use the digital model.

Phipps said recently that when he asks other firefighters if they heard him that night, that some say they didn't hear him while others say his message came out garbled, which to Phipps is almost the same thing.

It does seem to be the time for these radios and the sales practices employed to get them into fire departments across this country to be thoroughly investigated.

Submit your own story using the form at the bottom of the page!

From Port Richmond

Acting Fire Commissioner Lloyd Ayers has raised questions with city officials about radio communication problems at the scene of a Port Richmond fire on Aug. 20 that killed two firefighters.

In testimony yesterday before City Council, Ayers said he was seeking information from the city's Department of Public Property and Motorola Inc. ®™ about problems encountered by firefighters at the fatal fire.

The hearing was the second by City Council to examine persistent complaints from public-safety workers about the reliability of the new radio system. Motorola ®™ was awarded a \$54 million contract to outfit not only the Police and Fire Departments, but all city agencies involved in emergency situations.

In the face of mounting reports of radio problems, the City Controller's Office said yesterday it would launch an audit of the Motorola ®™ contract.

"We want to know whether the system is accomplishing all of its goals," said Tony Radwanski, deputy city controller.

Ayers testified that on the night of the rowhouse fire, firefighters at the scene complained of an excessive level of blocked calls - or "bonking," as they call it, for the busy signal the radios make when a call cannot be completed.

Ayers also said there was no evidence that a special emergency feature of the radios was activated. The new Motorola ®™ radios are designed to automatically open up a microphone for 10 seconds when an emergency button is hit. The so-called "hot mike" allows everyone to hear what is happening around a firefighter in distress.

But according to department records of communication that night, Ayers said there was "not evidence of audio from the hot mike."

Ayers said after the hearing that an investigation by the city's fire marshal into the fire is ongoing. In addition, because the fire resulted in the deaths of two firefighters, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, a federal office, is reviewing what happened that night.

Capt. John Taylor and firefighter Rey Rubio died after becoming trapped in the basement of a house on Belgrade Street in Port Richmond.

"We want to have all the information available to complete the investigation," Ayers said.

In July, Councilman Frank Rizzo called for a hearing into the radio issue after the Police Department experienced back-to-back episodes of curtailed service.

Yesterday's hearing was meant to update City Council on what has been happening behind the scenes between Motorola ® ™ and the Police Department to fix the problems.

Deputy Police Commissioner Charles Brennan said the department had "turned the corner" in terms of working out technical glitches with the new system that operates on the 800-megahertz band of the radio frequency spectrum.

But at the same time, Council heard about increasing reports of problems coming from firefighters.

Ayers said that since the new radio system was installed in October 2002, the department has received 50 written reports from fire commanders about radio problems at fire scenes. Forty percent of those reports have been filed since July.

Michael Moore, the Fire Department's chief dispatcher, said that of the 50 reports of radio problems:

10 were considered unfounded.

16 were attributable to hard-to-reach locations such as basements or elevator shafts.

12 were referred to the city's Public Property Department for further investigation.

12 are still being investigated.

City officials suspect that in some cases, cell-phone transmissions are blocking radio calls by rescue workers and police.

This week, an outside consultant turned over to the Public Property Department a report on cell-phone interference. Joseph James, deputy commissioner for public property, told Council that RCC Consultants was able to verify cell-phone interference at 44 locations that had been identified as possible "dead zones" by firefighters and police.

James said the level of interference ranged from "marginal to high."

James would not release the locations but said they were "well spread out."

Note from the authors of Radio Silence FDNY:

The radios in this story are the same radios that are the subject of the book, Radio Silence FDNY, the Motorola ® ™ XTS 3500 ® ™.

Do You Have a Radio Story to Tell Us?

We have been hearing from many of you across the nation and around the world that you have been having issues with your communications systems, specifically with radio systems. How do your departments' two way radios seem to be working? Are you aware of any problems? If so, please let us know! Use the form below to share your challenges with us, and we will post them up on the site for everyone to read about. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

We will not post your full name or e-mail address up on the site for privacy reasons!

(Entries that are **BOLDED** below are required and must be filled out!)

Your E-mail Address:

Your Full Name:

Your Story: