

[<<Back](#)

San Mateo County's Multi-Million Dollar Failure

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SAN MATEO COUNTY (KRON) -- The county's new multi-million dollar communication system isn't communicating. Dropouts, bugs, and areas of no coverage are forcing authorities to switch back to the old system while they wrestle with the problems.

The new state-of-the-art system has been down fo about a month. KRON 4's Vic Lee has learned the Sheriff's Department believes this new system may be unreliable in times of emergencies.

The San Mateo County Communications Center handles emergency calls including 9-1-1, fire, and ambulances. It is also the primary radio link for sheriff's deputies on the streets.

"So we need to make sure it's reliable and when they key that mic, somebody that can hear them," said San Mateo County Undersheriff Greg Munks.

To make the system more reliable, the county spent more than \$10 million putting in a state-of-the-art digital communication systems. The undersheriff says the system worked fine when it went on-line last year.

Then, Motorola came in and added some new software that was intended to fix some problems other people were experiencing in other parts of the country.

Suddenly there were bugs in the system, big ones. When a deputy called in while leaving a particular coverage area, the radio would malfunction. "While the mic was still keyed, the radio wouldn't send a signal back to let the system know someone was done speaking, so the system locked up," Munks said.

As a consequence, the dispatcher lost contact wit that part of the county.

Although the new digital system improved communications with cities along the coast, on the other side of the mountain range, it still could have been better.

The county has since reverted back to its analog system.

Motorola from its Chicago headquarters tells KRON 4 News this is a top priority for them, that they are making progress, but that there is still no timetable for when they can fix the problem.

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