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Cleveland bought \$2 million radio equipment that can't be used unless it buys rest of system

Posted by [Patrick O'Donnell/Plain Dealer Reporter](#) April 13, 2009 05:00AM
Categories: [Real Time News](#)



Gus Chan/The Plain Dealer

Cleveland police have spent \$2 million on new radio equipment that remains unused because the components needed to complete the system were not purchased.

The city of Cleveland last year spent more than \$2 million on radio equipment that sits unused and can't be put in operation unless the city spends millions more on gear from the same company.

The city purchased the device, called a zone controller, from Motorola last August for \$2.3 million in hopes of moving its radio system for police, fire and other departments to one that is compatible with other public safety forces in the area. The city used a federal grant awarded in 2005 to buy the gear.

The zone controller would be an important part of that project, but the city bought it before putting the project out to bid.

The city is now seeking bids to build a new radio system compatible with surrounding suburbs. The project could cost between \$30 million and \$60 million.

Because the equipment is proprietary and not compatible with the city's existing Motorola system -- or similar equipment made by other companies -- it can't be used now or if other companies win the bidding.

"We need the rest of the system for it to be in use," Erica Creech, spokeswoman for Cleveland's Department of Homeland Security, said last week.

Creech referred further questions to Norberto Colon, the city's Homeland Security director. Neither she nor Colon have returned calls for a week.

Experts say the zone controller allows users to move from one transmission zone to another without losing signals, much like cell phone roaming. It covers large areas,

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often several counties. Cuyahoga County is partnering with four other counties to create one zone throughout the region for its public-safety communications system.

Creating an interoperable radio system has long been a goal for safety forces, but the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks made it a priority. The federal government has backed a standard for such systems and is pouring millions of dollars into grants to develop them across the country.

Cleveland's request for proposals for its new radio system, issued last month, required bidders to include the unused Motorola controller in the new system. Creech said that when vendors objected that they could not use the Motorola equipment, the city backed down and is now asking them to suggest ways to use it.

The city's request for proposals is 79 pages, but details about the controller are listed in the 29 pages the city declined to release to The Plain Dealer, citing security concerns. Creech said the city considers technical details of the system and equipment to be sensitive information that it releases only to vendors actually bidding on the project.

"We wanted to make sure we weren't just passing out secure information willy-nilly," she said.

That action, and the city's decision to discourage vendors from touring transmission towers and dispatch centers, are part of a more closed process than other cities have followed.

Kansas City and Houston, in seeking bids for similar projects recently, posted the entire request for proposals on their city Web sites. Officials for both cities said they never considered restricting access to bid requirements.

And Kansas City required potential bidders to visit all the locations that would be part of the system. That city had a three-day pre-bid conference that each bidder had to attend and which included tours of all those cities' transmission towers and dispatch centers.

Keely Golden, who handles bids for Kansas City, said that Cleveland's restriction puzzles her and that limiting access would favor the company that installed and maintains the old system.

Golden said that allowing visits "makes for a level playing field" and that she would have expected other vendors to complain if they did not have that chance.

"I don't see how they wouldn't have," she said.

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COMMENTS (17)

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Posted by **medmed** on [04/13/09 at 5:22AM](#)

What really make this interesting is that the batteries that run the portable radios that are currently in use are also all going bad and will not hold a charge for an entire shift. It is a situation that is going to get someone hurt. J
"Just turn the radio on when you need it". Good thing people have cell phones!

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Posted by **carguy1** on [04/13/09 at 5:40AM](#)

Just as I expalined in older BLOGS... go back and read them, and then one can say, the carguy told you so.

Motorola has Cleveland by the short hairs because of their proprietary system, which yes folks, means that ONLY Motorola can bid, because the specs without saying so, do in fact say so. Pay 10 times as much for equipment that has that Motorola wing, versus other manufacturers that make just as good if not better equipment for much less money, but, Motorola got their foot in the door several years ago, and now, well... the rest of the story has pretty much been told.

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Posted by [theo6696](#) on [04/13/09 at 7:06AM](#)

carguy: If another vendor is willing to bid significantly lower (more than \$2.3 million lower), obviously the city should chuck the Motorola stuff. But they could also chuck the people who made this mistake.

I don't see why they need this radio system anyway, when there are more urgent problems in Cleveland. Maybe they should've had a cop in that park downtown where two people got executed, for example. Maybe they should also stop letting crack dealers out of jail so quick after they're arrested.

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Posted by [Toby2276](#) on [04/13/09 at 12:03PM](#)

OK, it's Cleveland. Look for someone who made money on the deal, and you will find out the reason why it was purchased...

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Posted by [mrflintstone](#) on [04/13/09 at 12:07PM](#)

Give the contract to Verizon.
Add a couple extra towers.
Done.

There is plenty of bandwidth, encryption can happen in software, off the shelf hardware can be used, this ain't rocket science.

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Posted by [REVTOM](#) on [04/13/09 at 12:20PM](#)

Norberto Colon, the city's Homeland Security director, WILL BE THE NEXT NAME YOU HEAR THE FBI IS INVESTIGATING.

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Posted by [jester6](#) on [04/13/09 at 12:29PM](#)

Unless things have changed in the last few years, Lake and Geauga County have Motorola systems too. It sounds like if Cleveland went with another vendor they would not be able to connect to a regional network trunking systems.

BTW, Lake and Geauga installed their Motorola trunked analog systems with money from funds for "disaster preparedness" when the Perry Nuclear Plant went on line in 1986. Although Lake County upgraded to a Motorola digital system about 10 years ago, Geauga County is operating with a system which was operational no later than the summer of 1986.

In Geauga County all the police and fire departments share the system. Even city and township police departments use the county radio system. I really do not understand how the Cleveland system can be obsolete when it is newer than the Geauga system.

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Posted by [Jizy4](#) on [04/13/09 at 12:34PM](#)

You never want to go proprietary unless there are no other options, what happens in the future when you want to add and service equipment?
They got you by the balls and will charge you up the ying-yang.

Whatever ding-dong made the \$2.3 million mistake is incompetent, has no idea what they're doing and should not have been in the position to screw up like this.

As mrflintstone pointed out, this ain't rocket science.

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Posted by **baphomet** on [04/13/09 at 12:39PM](#)

Per usual a decision is made by someone who can't understand technology. If this had been checked over by an IT guy the city would not have this problem. In my utopian view; someday business and political leaders will actually talk to someone with the background to make this type of decision and we won't have stories about unusable equipment.

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Posted by **aeg89t** on [04/13/09 at 12:45PM](#)

Grant money from the Federal Government spent impulsively by Erica Creech's supervisor.....Thomasina Chong! We should have known! Creech and Chong. Which other lunatics could possibly be running the asylum?

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Posted by **jabb0** on [04/13/09 at 12:46PM](#)

"The city is now seeking bids to build a new radio system compatible with surrounding suburbs. The project could cost between \$30 million and \$60 million."

So they spent 2 Million on crap, Then they want to spend 30-60 million to seal the deal?

Sounds like a bait and switch to me.

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Posted by **chv454ss** on [04/13/09 at 12:48PM](#)

Another brilliant move by the City of Cleveland. Who is in charge of all this incompetence, another politically appointed imbecile. This city had better start hiring some people who are knowledgeable in the specific projects they are dealing with. This isn't rocket science. You had better start rethinking how you do business in today's economy. Quit wasting the hard earned taxpayer's money as you have in the past. Our city deserves better than this and someone is responsible. Let's cut the fat and waste and do what is right for the residents of the city and surrounding suburbs. This also goes for the police, fire and rescue personnel who put their lives on the line for all of us.

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Posted by **parobe** on [04/13/09 at 12:55PM](#)

What the hell is wrong with Jackson and his administration. If he and his cohorts continue to screw things up like they have been doing, Cleveland will be nothing but a ghetto, wait, THIS WARNING IS TOO LATE!!!

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Posted by **60watt** on [04/13/09 at 3:05PM](#)

Is anyone suprised?

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Posted by **latinmama** on [04/13/09 at 3:41PM](#)

This is unbelievable. Spend \$2million without doing the research? Makes me wonder what else is going on behind the scenes! Everyone needs to know about this!!!

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Posted by **mrslu** on [04/13/09 at 4:29PM](#)

Theo6696, the city needs a new radio system because the old one is dying. There are stories on this webiste about the old system failing. If you want officers to hang out in parks, hoping to thwart a random shooting, the least we can do is give them a way to call for help if they get into trouble.

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Posted by **rightcleaning** on [04/13/09 at 4:32PM](#)

CAR 54 WHERE ARE YOU.....

Just another case of your tax dollars going down the drain. I hope that the kickback was worth it, we could always sell it on EBAY.

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