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MPD's Digital Radio System Down Thursday Morning

Police: Outage Due To Human Error

POSTED: 3:54 pm CDT October 7, 2010
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MILWAUKEE -- Milwaukee police officers were unable to communicate with one another for about 30 minutes Thursday morning because of problems with their new radio system.

The digital radio system, called Open Sky, went down at 11:20 a.m., police said.

Police said the outage was because of human error, not a technical failure. The company that runs the system performed an upgrade without first notifying the Police Department's Communications Center.

The upgrade inadvertently corrupted the system server, which activated a security feature. Shortly after the security feature was activated, a backup server was brought online that began to reregister the 1,800 system-wide radios, police said.

The Police Department said it received about 20 calls for service during the outage. All of the calls for service were successfully relayed to officers.

Officers were able to communicate using their mobile data computers and cell phones during the transition to the backup system.

At a Fire and Police Commission meeting Thursday night, a Milwaukee alderman and the police union expressed concern over the issue.

"I'm beginning to think it's a system that's never going to work adequately," said Alderman Bob Donovan.

The \$17 million system has reported dead spots and sometimes does not allow more than one officer to communicate at a time during an emergency.

"The bottom line is, as far as i'm concerned, this system has far too many problems with it to work effectively for the officers' safety," said Donovan.

Police Association President Mike Crivello asked for assurance this wouldn't happen again.

"Anytime the officers are in the field and unable to effectively communicate is an opportunity for some type of catastrophe to happen," said Crivello.

12 News repeatedly asked to speak with Milwaukee Police Chief Ed Flynn about the issue. Our request was not granted.

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