

Steuben radio system taken offline after failure

Updated: Thursday, 07 Apr 2011, 4:29 PM EDT
Published : Thursday, 07 Apr 2011, 4:29 PM EDT

- By Mike Marturello mikem@kpcnews.net

ANGOLA, Ind. (WANE) - *The following was provided by the Herald-Republican :*

Public safety officials across Steuben County have given a vote of no confidence to Steuben County's new radio communications system in light of a failure Tuesday night.

As a result, the new, \$3.5 million system has been shut down and the old system has been brought back online. The system provided by Harris Radio Corp. went online in January.

"We just want it fixed. We just want a system that will not fail," said Sheriff Tim Troyer.

Steuben County Commissioners are to take up the matter in their April 18 meeting, said Ron Smith, president of the commissioners.

"The are going to be called in because of the problems we have been having," Smith said. "It's time to call them (Harris) on the carpet."

"This is OK. I think we made a good decision," said Cindy Snyder, communications director. "We don't want the citizens or emergency personnel getting hurt, so we're going back to the drawing board. We just have to do it."

Troyer, Snyder and eight other public safety leaders sent a letter to the commissioners telling of the decision to shut the system down on Wednesday.

"Due to the many incidents of failure, the inability to communicate clearly and the inability to operate multiple officers/agencies properly without failure I am issuing to you a no confidence statement into the Harris Radio corporation and the Open Sky Radio systems," said the letter penned by Troyer and signed by the others. "I am further requesting that an immediate investigation be launched by you into proper action of obtaining a radio communications system that will provide the level of safety and security to all Steuben County Emergency Services and its citizens."

On Tuesday, numerous agencies were called to an incident in rural Angola where a 20-year-old man was attacked by four individuals who were armed with a knife, shovel and baseball bat. While many officials were trying to communicate concerning this incident, the system failed.

"It basically crashed. I have deputies looking for a knife-wielding suspect and they can't communicate," Troyer said.

Deputies from the multiple agencies ended up using their cell phones to communicate during the incident, which resulted in the arrest of 18-year-old Larry Allen Miller II, Angola, and three juveniles. Earlier this year there was a time when coverage of part of the county failed, Troyer said, resulting in police, fire and other emergency services providers having to use cell phones.

Troyer said he hopes the letter issued to the commissioners and forwarded to Harris Radio will result in getting the problems corrected.

"Hopefully what this will do is give the commissioners," Troyer said, "the muscle to go after it."

The radio project was billed as a state-of-the-art communications system that the county needed to move to because it would allow multiple agencies to communicate no matter what type of system they had. Steuben County has been known for being out front in communications technology and moved to adopt the project, which was originally going to cost in the \$5 million range. The system was paid through a loan from the county's Major Moves transportation fund, which was funded by the lease of the Indiana Toll Road.

Advertisement



The decision was made Wednesday to move back to the existing system that the Open Sky system was supposed to eliminate.

“As emergency service providers we must be able to communicate together, clearly and without failure. It is critical that whatever system is used, it must work correctly, at all times,” Troyer’s letter said.

“The safety of our safety people is at risk if they can’t communicate effectively when they are in harm’s way,” Smith said.

Snyder said some parts of the system were working properly. She hopes officials will be able to quickly determine what is wrong so the system can be brought back on line.

Troyer said glitches were expected, but he didn’t expect them to be this many and serious.