

## FIRE OFFICERS' UNION CHIEF CALLS FOR FDNY RADIO REPLACEMENT, GRAND JURY INVESTIGATION

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Speaking at a news conference yesterday, Peter Gorman, president of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association, demanded that the Fire Department of New York replace its hand-held portable two-way radios more quickly than the department has in mind.

UFOA represents about 2,500 captains, lieutenants and battalion chiefs among FDNY's 11,500-member department.

Last year, the department deployed 3,800 Motorola digital radios in an upgrade intended, among other things, to improve communications in high-rise buildings. In March 2001, the digital radios were withdrawn because of FDNY's complaints about inadequate coverage. The department redeployed its older analog radios, which were in use on Sept. 11, 2001.

Inadequate coverage with those radios has been cited in *New York Times* reports as contributing to poor communications and possibly greater loss of life—especially among public safety first responders—than might have been the case with better radio communications. Among those who lost their lives were 343 firefighters.

An Associated Press account of the news conference said that the fire department had issued a statement to say that its testing program for the digital radios was scheduled to end on Aug. 24. The news service said that the fire department has plans to improve its communications system to meet the demands of large emergencies and that the system involves upgraded versions of the digital radios that were removed in March 2001.

Gorman previously had reported in notes of a July 18 UFOA membership meeting that for nine days prior, the union had been acting to "force the city to act on our communications problems."

Gorman said that he had written letters to New York Fire Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta and Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau on July 10.

"I asked the commissioner to begin a crash program to replace the old Motorola radios with ones that work. And I asked him to fire or reassign the people who gave us the Motorola digital radios almost two years ago," Gorman said.

The letter to Morgenthau asked for a grand jury investigation of "the abject failure of the Motorola digital radios and the resultant delays in replacing the old radios, to the point where we were using the old Motorola's on Sept. 11, and 10 months later, we are still using those old, inadequate radios," Gorman said.

Gorman said that the fire commissioner met with him immediately after receiving his letter. He said that the commissioner seemed unhappy with Gorman's call for the dismissal of the people who gave the fire department the radios that he called "those digital lemons."

The union chief said that he sent the fire commissioner another letter on July 17, pledging UFOA's continued cooperation in the evaluation and testing of the new radios. But he pointed out that it has been almost two years since the radios were delivered to FDNY.

"It is long overdue that the department must make a decision to get these radios properly tested and evaluated or admit they don't work and scrap the program. Firefighters' lives are in jeopardy every day until the department can get new handie-talkies that work," Gorman said on July 18.

Gorman said on July 18 that he had not received a response to his July 10 request to the district attorney for a grand jury investigation.

"But I promise you the UFOA will not wait forever on that request before going public with it," Gorman said in his membership report. "Already a group of victims' family members went public with a demand for an independent investigation of what went wrong with our communications at the World Trade Center. We know what went wrong—we were operating with old radios that never worked in high-rise buildings and the new ones were locked away in a warehouse because the Von Essen administration [the previous fire commissioner] messed up completely."

Within a week or two, McKinsey & Co., a management consulting firm hired by FDNY to analyze its World Trade Center response, is expected to submit its report. A draft copy leaked to the *Times* said that an evacuation order issued over FDNY's radio system was not acknowledged and therefore apparently was not heard.

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