

Philadelphia Local Wants Faulty Radio System Fixed

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Local 22 fire fighters John Taylor and Rey Rubio died in the line of duty while responding to a basement fire after a malfunctioning Motorola radio system prevented them from letting fellow fire fighters know they needed help. Now, the families of the two fire fighters have filed suit against Motorola, alleging the company's radio equipment was directly linked to their deaths.

In August 2004, the two fire fighters responded to a basement rowhouse fire where the resident was illegally growing marijuana. Brian McBride, president of Local 22, recalls, "The two became trapped. When they tried to call for help, no one heard them because the radio system was not functioning properly."

"During that incident, we had 127 failed transmissions and three failed maydays," adds David Kearney, secretary for Local 22. The two officially died of asphyxiation when their air packs ran out.

"We had another member injured just four months prior to this incident when he became trapped in a second floor bedroom," says Kearney "The fire fighter pushed the mayday button several times, but nobody heard him. He suffered inhalation burns and other significant injuries because of this particular radio system failure."

Motorola's Ultra High Frequency (UHF) digital trunked radio system was installed in 2002. Since then, several formal complaints have officially been filed – many from fire fighters whose calls were not going through.

"The system we have now – bottom line – breaks too much," Kearney continues. "There are too many components for it to work properly. When you spend \$52 million, it should be an improvement. I don't see one here."

Other problems Philadelphia fire fighters experience include cell phone interference and an unpredictable battery life. In addition, the physical design – featuring small controls – makes it hard to use. Police using the same system have also had several of the same issues including system failures.

Local 22 hopes other IAFF affiliates can learn from what is happening in Philadelphia and other municipalities using similar systems. "This has the potential of becoming a nationwide problem," states Kearney. "Fire fighters need to take an active role in preventing these type systems from being implemented in the first place."

