

## LOCAL NEWS

**More concerns over police radio system**

Friday, March 07, 2008 | 7:05 PM

By Vic Lee

**A follow-up to our report on serious flaws in a new police communications system. As we reported, the Redwood City Police Department bailed out of San Mateo County's digital communications system because it didn't work as well as it should. Now, sheriff's deputies tell us they experienced similar problems.**

Redwood City pulled out in the summer of last year, but the sheriff's department with more than 400 deputies stayed on the \$20 million digital communication system. The group that represents deputies tells us that they too had serious concerns about the reliability of the new technology when it was first put in.

"The system is what it is. I'm glad that it's improved. It still needs improvement," says Heinz Puschendorf, president of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Deputies Association.

[Story continues below](#)

Advertisement



Puschendorf is talking about the county's conversion five years ago from an old analog communications network to a state of the art digital system. The sheriff's office and the Redwood City Police Department were the only law enforcement agencies to join the new system. The other 22 police departments on the Peninsula decided to stay with their analog radio systems which they felt were more reliable.

"It just wasn't as smooth and as predictable as the analog provided," says Hillsborough Police Chief Matt O'Connor who heads the Police Chiefs Association's technology committee.

ABC7 learned that after nearly four years at a cost of almost a million dollars, Redwood City bailed out and returned to its old analog system. The police department declined our request for interviews, but officers told us privately they had serious concerns about the reliability of the new system. They felt their safety was being jeopardized.

The city manager sent us a fax, saying "issues include an unacceptable level of audio distortion, the inability for officers to interrupt ongoing radio traffic with more urgent radio traffic and a lag time from depressing the mic button to when a user can begin transmitting."

Puschendorf says his deputies experienced similar problems.

Puschendorf: "If it was foggy, overcast, it wouldn't go as clearly, and certain times in buildings or in our facilities."

Vic Lee: "In a jail for instance?"

Puschendorf: "Yeah, there it would not work."

Chris Flatmoe heads San Mateo County's I.T. department. He admits the new system had problems at the outset. But Flatmoe says they've now been fixed.

"Subsequent to stabilizing the system and making a few changes to the system, I stopped hearing about such problems and I have not heard about any problems in the past two years," says Flatmoe.

Puschendorf agrees the system is much better than it was. Still, he says deputies are extra careful when they go on patrol.

"We try to make sure that we know where people start from and where they are ending," says Puschendorf. "Just to be on the safe side of caution, if the system can go down because of software... we'd like to be careful."

Despite problems San Mateo County had, most people we spoke with, including Puschendorf, believe digital is the system of the future. But Chief O'Connor says the challenge is finding a truly reliable system.

"We do need to develop or at least look into having a third party vendor or a consultant come in, examine what we have, compare and contrast that to the new technology that's coming up," says Chief O'Connor.

The Peninsula police chiefs say their analog systems work very well and that they're in no hurry to change them. When they do, they say they want new technology that's tried and proven.

(Copyright ©2008 KGO-TV/DT. All Rights Reserved.)