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News

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State to look at digital radio problems

By **Rusty Marks**
Staff writer

State emergency service officials are looking into problems reported with new digital radio systems like the one planned for Kanawha County and the rest of the state.

Kanawha County Commission President Kent Carper asked for a review of the county's digital radio plan after several communications trade publications reported problems with new digital communications systems. State officials have been pushing to digitize the state's emergency service radio systems.

Dave Erwin, Emergency Operations Center Coordinator for the Kanawha County Metro 911 center attended a regular meeting of the Kanawha County Commission on Thursday along with state interoperable radio coordinator Mike Todorovich.

The Charleston Police Department has been using the digital communications system for months for routine traffic calls, and the Charleston Fire Department just switched over to the digital system.

But at \$1,900 per radio, Carper wants to make sure the system operates the way it's supposed to.

"We cannot afford to have a system that has some unforeseen defect in it," said Carper, who presided over Thursday's meeting via telephone from Beckley.

Charleston police and fire officials haven't had any real problems with their digital radios, but other users all over the country have reported that the radios don't always work in the field.

Some police and firefighters have found that the digital signals can be stymied by ordinary background noise or even by walking into a building.

A recent study by the International Association of Fire Chiefs discovered that noise from fire engines, rescue saws or firefighters' oxygen masks can interfere with the digital radio signals.

Emergency service crews in Indianapolis want local officials to reconsider a \$37 million project to go to digital radios because of problems with the devices, and the city of Phoenix scrapped a \$120 million digital radio system because the radios didn't work.

Harrison, Marion and Monongalia counties were the first parts of the state to hook up to digital radio systems under a \$5 million startup grant. But some firefighters in Marion County have reported that their radios don't work the way they should.

State officials have heard similar complaints about the digital radio system. State officials will be meeting with vendors and manufacturers of the radios over the next 90 days to make sure the radios work.

Reach Rusty Marks at rustyma...@wvgazette.com or 348-1215.

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Take a look at <http://blog.tcomeng.com> for information about some of the problems experienced by police officers and firefighters.

Posted By: **WVFF** (4 hours ago)

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I vote to put Tom Miller on this commity

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