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Emergency Hearing Called To Address Safety Issues With Police Radios

FOP Threatening To Sue If Issues Are Not Resolved

POSTED: 6:23 pm EDT July 15, 2008

UPDATED: 6:48 pm EDT July 15, 2008

INDIANAPOLIS -- The controversy over Marion County's new emergency radio system came to a head Tuesday afternoon, when members of the county's emergency communications agency's board convened for a much-delayed discussion on the issue.

Four of the five MECA board members called the emergency hearing after several law enforcement groups expressed concerns about shortcomings with the new system, 6News' Jack Rinehart reported.

The issues were highlighted last week with the shooting of Indianapolis Metro Police Officer Jason Fishburn, officials said. Many 911 operators were overwhelmed with the noise from the new system's headsets and speakers and had difficulty responding to the situation, Rinehart reported.

"It cost us seconds in reaction time, and as a tenured control operator, I feel that's unacceptable," said 911 center trainer Michael Romansky during Tuesday's hearing. "And I know the officers on the streets would feel the same way if they were the ones injured."

Last month, firefighters lost communications for nearly a minute while fighting a huge apartment fire in Speedway, Rinehart reported. Shortly after, an entire shift of control operators had trouble hearing 911 calls and radio traffic, Sheriff's Department officials said.

Another complaint from law enforcement groups is a lack of a ring when 911 calls come into the county's dispatch center. A ring tone cannot pass through the new digital system, AT&T officials said. Instead, an alert on dispatchers' computer screens lets them know when there is an incoming call.

Indianapolis firefighters, the Marion County's fire chiefs, the Fraternal Order of Police union and Marion County Sheriff Frank Anderson have all expressed concerns about the new \$37 million system since it went online late last month.

Yet, Beech Grove Mayor Joe Wright, who serves as the MECA board president, has canceled the last two monthly meetings where the issue was set to be discussed, and was a no-show at Tuesday's emergency session.

The four board members who did attend voted unanimously to urge MECA to begin the purchase of equipment that would remedy the extraneous noise issue.

If that doesn't happen, members of the local FOP have voted to spend union dues to sue the agency.

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"I'm disappointed that all of the board members weren't here," said Indianapolis public safety director and board member Scott Newman after Tuesday's hearing. "But we got the job done and we got this problem fixed and I'm very pleased about that."

Previous Stories:

- July 10, 2008: [Police Worried About Missing 911 Calls With New System](#)
- June 30, 2008: [Firefighters, Police Union Decry Move To New Radio System](#)

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