

INDIANAPOLIS -- The plug will be pulled Tuesday on a 16-year-old radio system as emergency responders convert to a new digital system, but many are not happy with the move.

Fire officials said new doesn't always mean better, and firefighters across the city are again asking the Metropolitan Emergency Communications Agency to delay implementation of the \$37 million system, 6News' Jack Rinehart reported.

Marion County's fire chiefs said the new system will be better than the old one, but they aren't confident in its ability in emergency situations.

The digital system has already been activated in Beech Grove, Lawrence, Speedway and at Indianapolis International Airport.

The new system is supposed to greatly improve clarity and coverage across all of the county, but public safety responders have voiced concerns.

The Marion County Fire Chiefs Association said voice quality decreases markedly when firefighters put on protective masks.

With added noise from fire trucks, saws, fans and running water, firefighters fear they might lose communications with their commanders in emergency situations.

"I've said it over and over. There are a couple of things I hope they will at least take a look at and give us an answer to," said Dale Henson, president of the fire chiefs association.

Fire safety advocates claim that problems with a similar digital system contributed to the recent deaths of at least three firefighters nationwide.

The Fraternal Order of Police said the safety of police and firefighters should take precedence over a timeline in implementing the new system.

The police union said that public safety operators who must take calls from the public over a headset and calls from police over a speaker will become chaotic during traumatic events and natural disasters.

"This is going to cause mass confusion where we're going to miss calls and maybe cost some police officer or firefighter or citizen to be injured or, worst-case scenario, killed," said Marion County sheriff's Deputy Chief Joe McAtee.

A complete switch to the new radio system has been delayed several times.

Marion County Sheriff Frank Anderson wrote two letters asking the MECA board to address the concerns. The board did not respond and canceled June and July board meetings, Rinehart reported.

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- April 18, 2008: [Firefighters: New Radio System Has Major Flaws](#)

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