



Police unions file suit over county's new 911 system

CARL LINDQUIST -- *The York Dispatch*

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A lawsuit filed Monday on behalf of law enforcement officers across York County demands a return to the old 911 radio system while glitches with the new system are fixed.

The lawsuit alleges that communication problems with York County's new, \$36 million 911 system are a public safety hazard and are putting law enforcement officers at risk of injury or death. It also complains of inadequate training and problems with a computer-based system used to dispatch officers.

The lawsuit asks the court to prevent the county from continuing to use the new 911 and dispatching system until the problems are resolved and the proper training is provided.

County officials, meanwhile, say they are diligently working to resolve the problems. Bistline said he believes the significant problems should be fixed by next week.

Local police departments in stages were required to begin using the new digital radio system last year in place of its analog predecessor, according to the lawsuit.

The new system is part of an estimated \$67.8

million 911 project that also included the new 911 building in Springettsbury Township.

Union officers: The lawsuit was filed Monday afternoon against York County and Emergency Services Executive Director Eric Bistline on behalf of three Fraternal Order of Police lodges that together represent every union law enforcement officer working in York County except Pennsylvania State Police, said attorney Ed Paskey, who is representing the plaintiffs.

State Police use their own radio system.

The lawsuit alleges that officers have experienced total communication failures and garbled transmissions using both their car-mounted and handheld radios. The lawsuit also alleges that officers have not gotten adequate training to use the equipment.

"We understand technology is not infallible," Paskey said. "However, the rate and severity of the circumstances is disturbing."

County officials have acknowledged problems, such as lost and garbled transmissions, developed as more police departments began using the new system. .

Close: Bistline said technicians are in the process of installing software fixes in portable radios that seem to be resolving communication issues in conjunction with software fixes made to the main network.

M/A-COM, which developed the system, is

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working on software changes to address problems where the car-mounted equipment "freezes," he said.

He expects problems with both pieces of equipment to be fixed across the county by the end of next week.

County solicitor Mike Flannelly said he couldn't comment on the lawsuit directly without seeing it first. But he said county officials are working as hard as they can.

"Everybody regrets having these technical problems, no more so than the county commissioners, I'm sure," he said.

"They are frustrated and unhappy with the current situation but we have to trust in Eric Bistline and his staff that they are making the best possible decisions for the safety of people in York County."

Once in good order, the new system will be far better than its predecessor, he said.

Paskey said the new system cannot be a work in progress.

The police unions decided to file the lawsuit after because the county has failed to provide any timetable for fixes to the new systems, he said.

Union representatives asked during a Jan. 20 meeting to revert to the old system, the lawsuit states, but the request was denied.

M/A-COM, which developed the system, acknowledged during the meeting it had never installed this type of system in an area as large as York County using the same bandwidth, according to the lawsuit.

Paskey said he's hoping the lawsuit stimulates new discussion with the county. If that happens it would be up to the officers to drop the lawsuit.

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