



County still having radio system troubles

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December 03, 2009 04:00 pm

— Since the emergency services committee voted unanimously in July to accept the new county emergency communications system several county commissioners and emergency personnel have reported some coverage problems with the radio system.

County commissioners on the committee met last month prior to the county commission meeting to discuss the situation.

"We've had some problems and we need them solved. I'm tired of being told repeatedly that we're getting 95 percent coverage and I know we are not," 7th District Commissioner Kenneth Carey said.

Carey, who works for the Cumberland County Fire Department as one of several emergency responders and firefighters, presented EADS with a packet of issues.

"These are all calls and times and locations where we're having problems and I know there's more," Carey said.

Chuck Sackley, vice president of operations of EADS Secure Networks, attended the meeting as well as nine others with EADS Secure Networks. The emergency communication system has shown some areas along I-40 near the Crab Orchard and Ozone areas where coverage is spotty as well as other areas in the county where there shouldn't be problems.

"It doesn't make sense why one day you have coverage in an area and then another day you don't," Carey said.

"We have done a lot to improve the coverage and are still working on these issues. Out of 235,000 calls about 8,800 did not go through. These were push to talks (PTTs) where somebody else was trying to talk at the same time. Now, 157 of these were where people couldn't talk — they were out of coverage," Sackley said. Officials with EADS went around with deputies and county firefighters and tested problem areas in the county in order to solve communication gaps in the new system.

"We're committed. This is strategically essential for us that this system be a success. We're not leaving. I've got 10 people here tonight and half of them are going to stay. We're going to have some more training for the operators. I'm not saying there's no problem. There still are some. Some are with programming and knowing how to program," Sackley said.

The new communications system includes antennas on five emergency tower sites, as well as some low gain antennas. It is a P25 digital trunked radio system.

EADS officials will add additional antennas in problem areas and will have to change some direction on a few of the antennas that are currently installed on towers.

"We have to get approval by the companies in order to move these, but once we do that and add the additional antennas, I think we'll see some major improvements," Sackley said. "This is a focused effort. It won't be overnight, but we will stay and tackle every issue.

Sackley said EADS plans on offering more operations training to county personnel who are on the radio system.

He also told commissioners every call that comes in and goes out is recorded in the computer systems attached to the radio system.

"We know all of the calls, whose radios they come from and where they come through and if they don't. We are pinpointing where the problems are and are working to get this taken care of," Sackley reassured commissioners.

The committee will meet again next month to discuss any updates on the system.

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