



District first responders struggle with catastrophic radio failure

By DC Crime Examiner, Alan Henney
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Washington, D.C. --- The digital Motorola radio system used by D.C. police and firefighters crashed Monday evening around 7:15 p.m., forcing officials to find alternate methods to dispatch first responders to emergencies.

Fire/EMS personnel, who use 800 MHz radios, were later notified to switch their communication to radio channels used by Montgomery County. Montgomery's system does not completely cover the District, so officials contacted Arlington and Alexandria

to utilize some of their channels as well to enhance coverage.

The majority of the newer public safety radio systems in the D.C. area are 800 MHz, which benefits fire/EMS crews during such a radio outage.

D.C. police officers, who unlike firefighters use UHF radios, were stuck checking mobile computers, or responding to their district stations to wait for calls from their 9-1-1 dispatchers. They had no other UHF system to fall back on. Some officers used their cell phones.

All back-up systems failed. A back-up system which operates without a centralized computerized controller, known as "failsoft," was partially operational by 8:40 p.m. But officers and dispatchers found it awkward to use and were unfamiliar with its use. It was not until 12:15 a.m. that the system returned to normal operation.

The problem reportedly involved an electrical outage at the McMillan Drive NW facility where the radio system is housed. See this [link for more info on the District's radio network](#).

Repeated calls to the D.C. police public information office were answered by

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