

State's \$400M Radio System Not Working Properly

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Security will be tight when Pittsburgh hosts the most powerful nations on the planet during next week's Group of 20 economic summit, but abc27 News has learned one of the state's most powerful and expensive tools in fighting crime is struggling.

Sources tell us the 800 megahertz statewide emergency radio system is not working properly. State police aircraft were unable to communicate with patrol cars on the ground during G-20 preparations.

State police will not comment, but lawmakers will. "I think it's ridiculous that we've spent almost \$400 million and more into a system that's not reliable and not performing," said Rep. Ron Marsico, R-Dauphin. "It's an embarrassment to our Commonwealth and our state police."

Marsico is calling for hearings. Sen. John Rafferty, R-Berks/Chester/Montgomery, also wants answers. Coatesville is in his district and he says the state police task force sent in for a series of arsons also had problems with 800 megahertz.

"The 800 megahertz system seems to be a dream," Rafferty said. "It was conceived under the Ridge Administration and continued under the Rendell Administration. There's a lot of money invested into the system. It's not working the way the bill of goods was sold to the Commonwealth."

Charlie Brennan is deputy secretary for public safety radio in the Governor's Office of Administration. He says the emergency radio system has great promise, but said that building a system from scratch has its perils.

"Pennsylvania wasn't on the cutting edge of this technology," he said. "We were on the bleeding edge of it. We were way ahead of anybody. All the software we got was always new, which is not a good place to be. You never want to be the first in brand new software."

As for Pittsburgh and the G-20, state police will rely on the older radio systems. They kept the old radios along side the new in patrol cars while transitioning to 800 megahertz.

"I would not put the radio system out there if I thought it was endangering our troopers or our citizens and I'm the guy who makes that call," said Capt. Adam Kisthardt, part of the technology bureau staff at Pennsylvania State Police headquarters. "I sleep at night because I know they have the VHS radio system to go to if there's a problem."

abc27 News was told safety will not be compromised because the back-up radios are sufficient for protection.

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