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Resident Asks City Officials to Act Fast

A concerned Naperville resident wants city officials to examine what he and some first responders believe are fatal flaws in the newly implemented emergency radio system.

By [Carrie Frillman \(users/carrie-frillman\)](#) | [Email the author \(#\)](#) | March 17, 2011

A concerned resident is asking that the city take a hard look at its new emergency radio broadcasting system and what he says are its true shortcomings.

[Naperville \(http://naperville.patch.com/listings/city-of-naperville-8\)](http://naperville.patch.com/listings/city-of-naperville-8) resident Bill Eagan addressed the [Naperville City Council \(http://www.naperville.il.us/council.aspx\)](http://www.naperville.il.us/council.aspx) Tuesday evening to share what he says firefighters, police officers and others believe are failures in the new radio system, which is shared by Naperville and [Aurora \(http://www.aurora-il.org/\)](http://www.aurora-il.org/).

"... It involves protecting lives and not just of our citizens, but of our first responders," he said, reading from a statement he'd prepared. "To get straight to the point, a system of this importance and magnitude needs to have no failure tolerance."

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coordination among the police and fire departments in the area.

It also renders scanners tuned in to by community members, reporters and the general public to be useless because the system operates off the city's 43-mile fiber optic ring.

But Eagan said, Naperville is "seeing the same issues as other cities," and that "we must act and act swiftly," to correct them.

He said he has filed several [Freedom of Information Act Requests \(http://www.state.gov/m/a/ips\)](http://www.state.gov/m/a/ips) and has not found any record of a load test of the system being done. He had also not found information about the city completing a power emergency simulation to ensure that if energy is lost, the radio system remains in tact.

"I did not see any inter-operability test calls to the State of Illinois, or to [Lisle \(http://lisle.patch.com\)](http://lisle.patch.com), [Bolingbrook \(http://bolingbrook.patch.com\)](http://bolingbrook.patch.com), [DuPage \(http://dupageco.org\)](http://dupageco.org) or [Will \(http://www.willcountyillinois.com/\)](http://www.willcountyillinois.com/) counties, nor any other agency that may need to be contacted in case of emergency," Eagan said to the council. "I did not see any testing of the firewalls around the network to make sure that we are as safe as we can be against computer hacks."

[City Manager Doug Krieger \(http://www.naperville.il.us/citymanager.aspx\)](http://www.naperville.il.us/citymanager.aspx) said Naperville refuses to accept a radio system that is less than the best.

But local first responders have also shared concerns about the Harris/OpenSky system. Police have said they often lose contact with fellow officers or firefighters because of "dead zones" in the city. Messages are often jumbled after people's voices are translated by the digital system, they have said.

"The problems with our current radio system are very alarming and the safety of our employees the public, needs to be addressed by every member of the Naperville City Council," said Vince Clark, president of [Naperville's Fraternal](#)

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system."

He said the residents of Naperville have understandably high expectations for the service their public safety employees provide.

"In order to meet these high expectations, we need a public radio system we can depend on," Clark said. "The system we are currently using does not meet those expectations."

Eagan asked the city council to add his, and others' concerns, as an agenda item for a future meeting.

"We have implemented a system with no plan B ..." he said. "We cannot hit the escape button here ... it needs to be fixed quickly and carefully."



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Naperville tries to allay fears over new radio network

By MARIE WILSON

Radio transmission interference. Gaps in coverage. Garbled communication.

Naperville resident Bill Eagan says he warned councilmen about these issues and more before they authorized a \$10 million contract with radio vendor Harris Corporation for an OpenSky digital radio network.

After reading of continued radio problems in a Daily Herald news story March 10, Eagan spoke to council Tuesday night calling for the city to reconsider several aspects of the contract and bring the issue up for fuller discussion.

Eagan said Naperville radio users may not be getting prompt enough response to their reports of failed communication within buildings, signal interference and inaudible messages because the city already has paid most of the contract amount.

The city is holding back \$2.6 million in payments to Harris — about 25 percent of the contract amount — until officials are satisfied the system and individual radios are functioning as expected, said telecommunications manager Dan Voiland.

Even without making the last payment, City Manager Doug Krieger said engineers with Harris have been responding to the city's concerns.

"I can assure that we have their attention," Krieger said.

Representatives of the company hold biweekly meetings with officials and radio users from Naperville and Aurora, which also switched to a Harris OpenSky radio network Dec. 1.

Harris also has made several software fixes to the Naperville system and sent new antennas that will improve in-building coverage, Krieger said. The antennas arrived Tuesday.

"Harris will continue to work with the city to improve overall system performance, even if it is determined that the system is being affected by outside interference," said Victoria Dillon, communications director for Harris Public Safety and Professional Communications. "Since transitioning to this new system, Naperville radio users have successfully sent or received millions of communications using this system."

Radio users recognize the new system is succeeding in many cases, and also recognize it replaces an aging analog system that wasn't perfect, either, said John Sergeant, vice president of the Naperville Professional Firefighters union.

Union members know changes are being made, but their safety concerns — which they filed in an official document

to the fire chief March 8 — remain.

“What we’re concerned about is we’re losing communication with incident commanders on the scene of fires,” Sergeant said. “That’s a serious issue and the city doesn’t discount it.”

Eagan said rank and file police and firefighters should be involved in the decisions of whether and when to give the OpenSky network final approval and pay Harris the remaining \$2.5 million of the contract.

Krieger said rank and file employees “absolutely” will be involved in those decisions and already have made their concerns heard by tracking every glitch they’ve encountered.

“If it’s not performing, we need to be honest about that,” Sergeant said. “We don’t want this system to fail. Failure is not really an option; it needs to perform.”

Eagan also called for council to add the radio system to an upcoming agenda for further discussion. But councilman Doug Krause said there’s nothing to discuss; the contract already is approved and staff are working with the vendor to get the system performing at an acceptable level.

Still, Eagan fears his earlier warnings — that other cities had experienced problems with Harris digital radio systems — may not have been heard.

“My concerns were pretty much dismissed with an attitude that ‘We are Naperville; we can do it better,’” Eagan said Tuesday night. “I had hoped you’d be correct.”

Fears: City says they will withhold final payment until concerns satisfied

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