

Fire Chiefs' & Fire Fighters' Association of York County, Inc.

**330 Emig Road
York, PA 17406**



**Monthly Meeting
3rd Monday**

April 29, 2009

President Rick Shank called the special meeting of the York County Fire Chiefs and Firefighters Association to order and led the pledge to the flag. 89 people were in attendance.

This meeting was called to discuss radio and paging issues related to the old and new system. No other items will be discussed.

The following rules of order will apply for the Special Meeting

1. One spokesman will be heard from each department
2. When recognized, please give your name and station number
3. We will only discuss an issue once.
4. Please be courteous and remember that everyone needs time to talk. Also we are taking minutes and documenting all reported problems so please talk clear and slowly so the information can be documented.
5. Again, I would like to remind everyone that we will be updating the news media after the meeting. Please refrain from giving comments to them.
6. We have a meeting scheduled to discuss the issues discussed at this meeting with individual County Commissioners.

I would ask Eric Bistline to up date us on the paging and radio systems. He has several representatives from the agencies from the agencies that provided equipment for the radio system, CAD, and paging system.

Eric Bistline:

Our primary focus tonight is to relay to you the issues surrounding the radio system and paging system. We have templates of the Radio Talkgroups. The talkgroups have changed.

The vendors are here to discuss. They include: New World Systems (CAD & Digital), EGIS software (Public Safety) Radio System, Maycomm, & Tyco.

We have a lot of redundant software. There is software that backs up the primary software. We only had 7 pages that failed, of thousands that are paged on a weekly basis. That is still too many though.

Al Bennett (of New World Systems):

About the missing pages: What happened? What has been done? What is a solution? The paging system consists of several parts. There is the CAD software, a traffic cop, two pipes – a primary pipe to a device that transmits the page. The 2nd pipe is redundant. They are not the same, but are very much similar. New World Systems supplies the CAD Software and the traffic cop.

The Message starts in the CAD, then it goes to the traffic cop, then the primary and secondary pipe. If the primary page fails, then the back-up pipe sends out the page. The traffic cop waits to receive the page.

The issue that stopped the 7 pages from being dispatched occurred in the pipes to the transmitter. Something clogged the back-up pipe. The device was not receiving messages from the secondary pipe. It over flowed and blocked the message from the primary pipe.

The Fix: People started to diagnose the problem. They turned off the back-up, so pages would continue to go out. A plan is being executed. The pipe is being reconfigured as a back-up by the end of Friday. Why did the Q overflow? We now have a monitor on the traffic cop. Notifications are sent to a monitor in Michigan, where the vendor can manually intervene. We are looking to expand and improve the software. We have applied new patches to some of the drivers. There have not been any problems in the main pipe, just the back-up.

Why was this not experienced before? The County is advanced in its use. We are setting a new standard. We are given an opportunity to improve the system. There is also actually a third pipe to get the pages out. It is not connected directly, but with some software, it is possible. We will continue to monitor the pipes for some time.

Comments or Questions:

Dave Nichols: Has the intercommunication information flow improved? This includes callbacks to the Chief's who call in with issues about the paging system, receive ticket numbers, but never receive a phone call from the 911 Center stating the issue has been addressed. Also, why was Eric not made aware that the pages failed for the Dover Twp. Call until the following morning?

Eric Bistline: All text pages are read. The pages appeared as if all of them were going out. The traffic cop was letting some pages go out, but others were not going out.

Dave Nichols: Why are some of the pages coming across with the ProQa? This is of no use to the firefighters. Instead, responders have to ask for additional information. There are only a small amount of characters that are used during dispatches, but the information was never ending during Chief 27's funeral. The pages are not consistent. Additionally, there is legislation in the works to ban texting and reading while driving.

Cindy Dietz: The pages may vary from one dispatcher to the other. If we don't know there is a problem, we can't address the issue.

Eric Bistline: The primary equipment is located at 911. Pipe B (Back-up) is located in Manchester. The problem is the long distance from one to the other. They have difficulty communicating from one to the other. We have started talking to Lebanon County, who has a system similar to ours. The quality of the pages are different from ours. Their pages include the type of call, a brief narrative, the street and cross street. New World CAD has two screens. There is a standard screen, that we have, and then there is also a custom screen. On the custom screen, there is area under "Nature of call" that can add additional information. We are making the change to the custom screen. We will be moving the screens around probably next week. We are looking to a box alarm section to the screen. This is all a software improvement. The expenses have been approved by the County Commissioners.

Kris Krichten: During the Dover Twp call, multiply fire departments missed the call. Why are Fire Chiefs not being informed?

Eric Bistline: We researched where the pages failed. It appeared that the pages went out. The pages that failed were not one right after the other. Just one page failed here and there. For example: pages 1 & 2 went out, but page 3 failed, page 4 & 5 went out, but pages 6 & 7 failed. It was not noticed right away.

Joe Yahnke: Station 34 missed a RIT call for station 89. When was 911 advised of the issue at the Dover Twp. call?

Eric Bistline: Different technicians look at different trouble tickets. They open the ticket, test the pages, stop & start the traffic cop. It will be hard to notice a problem. There was nothing alarming. We had no way of monitoring the pages, until now. Every call is investigated during normal business hours. I.T. staff is informed of the problem.

Kris Krichten: On the second larger failure, no one got a phone call. There needs to be a backup. We need policies & procedures.

Eric Bistline: There are several ways of getting the pages out. The info rad (manual) is a third method that we can use. Pages are going out. The order that pages goes out are the following: The Primary, the Back-up,

the Info rad, the Low band, and lastly the call-out way. If one system fails, we use the next back-up system inline.

Kris Krichten: When I called into the 911 Center to inform them we did not receive the pages, I received a snooty response by the dispatcher. Maybe the 3N system could be a possibility to inform everyone there is a problem.

Cindy Dietz: We sent pages out through the info rad system stating that the system went down. The info rad has been stopped.

Kris Krichten: There has been a lack of communication with the system. We don't know when the system is back online.

Cindy Dietz: We can send out numeric pages that the system is back up, and working.

Tony Myers: When I called in to the 911 Center to inform them I did not receive a page, I got a response at; "I know the page went out." How do they know it went out?

Eric Bistline: The dispatcher is looking at a monitor. It came up on the screen, showing it went out. We are now monitoring the issue.

There are issues over in the Penn Twp & Hanover area with the paging system. There are 2 options we have. 1: We could upgrade the antenna or 2: We could use a repeater to accept the page and it repeats the page. Option 2 is cheaper, and we do not need a license from the FCC. The repeater would be placed on Hanover Hospital. We have good coverage with the system, but it is not 100%. We are looking at putting in an amplifier to improve the system.

Tony Myers: What are we looking at as far as a time frame to the digital pager switch over?

Eric Bistline: Sooner rather than later.

President Shank: There is a new device that the dispatchers know. The software solution will notify them. The monitor is a receiver that prints out text.

Joe Stevens: You say the system is a backup and is functional. The backup is not up and running yet. The info rad is not being used unless 911 knows there is an issue.

President Shank: I ask that the maintenance department to look into it.

Tony Myers: The digital pagers are our primary source for dispatching. Yet, the digital pagers did not work when Engine 61-1 is not out.

Cindy Dietz: The back-fill list has been corrected. It can be tested tomorrow if you would like.

Dave Nichols: There is currently legislation in the works that it will be a traffic violation for reading and texting while driving.

Eric Bistline: Firefighters should be exempt from the legislation.

Kris Krichten: 8 months ago, there was a problem, and we were told not to rely on the digital pagers.

Eric Bistline: We are not changing from digital pagers to voice pagers. We have invested too much money, the County is changing. The digital pagers are currently working. The back-up is not functional & Hanover area is not 100%. We are working on the new CAD screen. We are not prepared to stop the low-band pagers. The digital pagers are our primary source.

Kurt Holloway: We received a page with just the date, time, & the ticket number, nothing else. No one got back with any in the department regarding the issues. There is marginal coverage in our area.

Eric Bistline: Call in and ask for the ticket number. You should be getting call backs from someone in the 911 Center.

Erik Brown: My department is constantly receiving pages right and left for the same call. We counted 14 pages for one call. Is there a way that we can cut down the number of pages that are sent through?

Eric Bistline: Reconfiguring the software should help. Some of the pages will still be circumstance. There are certain codes and station cap codes.

Jim Walsh: There are 16 paging transmitters. There is monitoring on all sites. How do you know things are coming in from one, but maybe not going out?

Eric Bistline: Technicians are dispatched to the site to investigate the problems. The transmitter is functional.

Jeff Griffith: Station 57's tones did not go off for about 5-6 minutes. Yet, station 55 & 56's digital tones went off. There was a Haz-Mat call, and the new radios could not get out

Troy Snyder: Does the system meet the NFPA and ISO standards?

Eric Snyder: Yes, the system does meet both standards.

Rodney Miller: Are there at least 2 voice dispatches still going over the system?

Cindy Dietz: Yes, they are still dispatching voice dispatches on 33.88 & 33.90.

Joe Madzellan states that he has been using station cap codes. There is one tone for a new call, and a different tone for a call update. He says they work well.

Eric Bistline: There has been one police department that has been working hard with the 911 Center on reporting what issues they are having, when, where, what shift, etc. They have identified the issues with the distribution system. Some of the transmissions are not being received, or are not clear. There has been an issue with the emergency button. The officer had to push the emergency button multiple times to get a clear channel. Trouble tickets are reviewed everyday. A number of them were fixed with software updates. We met with Tyco. As a result of the meeting, there is now 1 technician on site everyday. We are now on a 30 day time clock. This clock started Tuesday, two weeks ago. What will stop this time clock you ask? There are three levels of severity that will stop the clock. The highest level is the "Severe failure." An example would be if we lose no more than 2 channels. The next highest is an "Intermediate failure." An example would be if there is a failed antenna or cable per transmitting site. The lowest failure level that will stop the clock is the "Minor failure". An example of a minor failure would be a bad power supply. Terminal issues have been solved. The software uploads for the West Manchester Police department has been successful. They have been tested at Tyco and in the field. Since the lawsuit has surfaced, the County has been moving forward cautiously. There will be several things that need to occur with the radios. The batteries will be switched out. The new batteries now have an 11 hour rating. The radios will need software updates. The single use chargers and the multi use chargers will need to make sure they are working properly, as well as the base stations. We will need to schedule the installation of the mobile units. We will patch the primary and zone channel in the mobile units. There is training video being that is very user friendly that deals with York County radios. We are looking at a cut over date around mid to late July. That gives everyone a good month to do the training.

Kurt Holloway: After the 30 days, we will accept the system. The "Can you hear me now" test will take a full days. The Police department does not patrol 58's area. Is three days going to be enough?

Eric Bistline: Let us know where the low lying areas are, so we can send crews out to test those areas.

Jim Walsh: We pay for the install and removal of the old equipment. Do we have to remove the old equipment?

Eric Bistline: If you want to, you can keep your old equipment. The decision is up to your departments.

Dave Nichols: The Police have been having problems in the Hellam area. There was a call for shots fired.

Eric Bistline: We have received some phone calls and emails stating that they have much better coverage with the new system. We have not had the latest updates installed in all the radios. Once we get them completed, most of the issues should go away. The coverage issue is with the P.T.T. The drill QR Team had problems when they were recently at the one elementary school. The issue was in their talk groups. During the Hellam Twp. call, no one could talk to the P.S.P. helicopter. In this case, make a request to the dispatcher, and they should be able to intervene.

Dave Nichols: How can we accept a system that does not have the latest updates? The 30 day clock should be stopped until the latest and greatest updates are installed on the radios.

Eric Bistline: Yes, the QR Team had problems, but don't mention it. We know that that one location is a no coverage area.

Lets talk about these new templates that were handed out this evening.

Eric Bistline: Hold off on the templates for right now. We will discuss them a little later.

Joe Stevens: For base station, it will cost us \$250 a channel for us to a license from the FCC. That will cost us \$15,000 for our license on the base station. Why do we have to have a new license for the new system, and we can't just use the old license?

Eric Bistline: You do not need a bonzer by a conversion, but you can't do it without a license. You just can't order a base station without a license. An on-site inspection must be done by the FCC and all. The coordinates must be taken of the exact location.

Kurt Holloway: There station ordered a base station. They talk clearly in the Utac program, but does the emergency button work in this mode?

President Shank: The Fire Dept. radios are different from the Police. That Utac channel is only for those in close proximity. It does not go to the 911 Center. The coverage depends on everything. We will let the Radio Committee look into the vehicle base repeater options.

Tony Myers: After looking at the Radio Channel templates, shouldn't the Fire & EMS templates be uniform?

Steve Buffington: When you are working in close proximity, you will need to switch to Utac. We will workout the templates with the Communication Committee.

Eric Bistline: If you are in an area that has no coverage issues, you will need to switch over to Utac. If you do not have coverage issues, then you won't need to switch over to Utac.

Ryan Brenneman: If over a two week period, every department brings in just 5 radios per a station to be reprogrammed, we could begin to canvas the area. It would be best to have all the batteries and chargers. Maycomm has increased the price for the templates.

Radio System Vender: The radio does not scan. The template is complex. Utac can be a one button in, one button out format. Email us your vender, to see if they will honor the install.

Tony Myers: When we switch over, can we still talk to other counties?

Eric Bistline: Yes you can still talk with other counties.

Tony Baker: We chose another vender that is not the same as what everyone else is using. Can we get the discounted rate?

Eric Bistline: We would have to negotiate with the vender. You will need to let us know who the vender is.

Scott Gingrich: Will you extend the warranty on the radios until you accept the radio system the second time?

Eric Bistline: Yes, your warranties will start from the time we accept the radios. We will keep you updated with the Radio System.

Motion was made by Dave Nichols to adjourn the meeting. 2nd: Chief Buffington Motion Passed

Sincerely,

Heather Marsteller

Heather Marsteller
Recording Secretary