

Police radio problems resolved

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MIDDLETOWN -- The problem with police radio interference, which risked officer and citizen safety, has been cleared up, officials said Tuesday.

Communications specialists identified the source of the recurring interference on the Middletown Police Department's main frequency and corrected the trouble.

Middletown Director of Communications James Milardo had been working on the problem with the state Department of Environmental Protection, which was believed to be the source of the trouble. The state had hired a private firm, Manchester-based Marcus Communications, to assist in tracking the interference.

"Our problem is cured," Milardo said Tuesday.

The source of the interference, which happened mainly during inclement weather and changing atmospheric conditions, "was very off the wall," said Bruce Marcus, chief technology officer.

"It was a bizarre set of circumstances," Milardo said. On Friday afternoon, DEP officials were calling to field units across the state to see if they could be heard on Middletown's frequency. A few were heard in the area of New Hartford and Barkhamsted near some reservoirs, Milardo said.

"..It was determined that the interference was being caused by some radios that had been donated to the Metropolitan District Commission," according to a Marcus Communications press release. "The radios, originally meant to communicate with the old State Police system, were inadvertently interfering with Middletown's system."

Milardo said the radios the MDC officials were using were "opening the door to our frequency."

The interference would last between a few seconds to a minute and consisted of static, clicks or voices. It began blocking radio communications between police officers and the central dispatching center in September causing potentially hazardous situations.

"MDC shut them down and apologized," Milardo said.

"These (MDC) radios have since been turned off, and confirmation has been made that Middletown's police radio system is now operating normally," according to the Marcus Communications press release.

Middletown Police Capt. Philip Pessina said the city and the police department "were not faulting MDC or the traffic. It was legitimate traffic, and they were apologetic."

"We're pretty well assured that they tackled the problem," he said. "Until we go through some bad weather days, we'll see."

The Middletown Police Union members, who had been concerned about the problem for officer and citizen safety, did not want to jump to immediate conclusions.

"We're cautiously optimistic that the problem is rectified for good," Middletown Police Officer William Clayton, police union vice president, said. "It's too early to call it a total success."

The union members are appreciative of what work has been done, including lauding Milardo for his efforts, he said.

"Time will tell if the problems do indeed resurface," Clayton said. "We'd like to see if it reoccurs. Hopefully it doesn't come back."

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