

The Ragchewer

April 2008

The monthly newsletter of the
Lancaster & Fairfield
County Amateur Radio Club

On the Web: www.k8qik.org

Send email to K8QIK@columbus.rr.com

Club Meetings :
1st Thursday of every month
at 7:30 pm at the club house.

VE Testing:
The third Sunday of every
even numbered month.
Register at 9:30 am and
testing at 10:00 am

**Club House
Location:**
On State Route 37 (Granville
Pike) next to Beavers Field.

Nets:
Mondays at 9:00 p.m.
147.03 MHz (+.6)
146.70 MHz (-.6) Alt. Freq.
443.875 MHz (+5)
Thursday at 8:00 p.m.
443.875 MHz (+5)
UHF linked system

Packet BBS 145.53MHz
K8QIK-1 BBS
K8QIK-2: Ohio53

Weather Spotter Net:
146.76 Repeater with 123Hz
tone Tuesday at 7:30 pm
Alt frequency 147.24 MHz

April Birthdays

Mary Webb	KC8GUN
Richard Smith	WA8VCV
William Tschopp	WA8WRM
James Whitaker	W8HOS
Robert Hughes	KI8JM
Mary Travis	KD8EEI

Thursday Night Radio Night

Radio night is every Thursday at 6:00 p.m.
(except the first Thursday which is the club
monthly meeting). Work a little HF, maybe
build something? How about a hot cup of
coffee. We'll have them all waiting for you.

ARRL Membership

When you join the ARRL, or renew your
membership through the club, we retain \$15 for
each new membership OR lapsed membership
(of two years or more), and we retain \$2 for
each renewal. Please support our club, it doesn't
cost any more. Send or give all paperwork to
Treasurer with your money.

April VE Test:

The next VE test will be Sunday April 20th at
the clubhouse on Route 37. Register at 9:30
a.m. and testing begins at 10:00 a.m. Prepare
yourself, take this test and upgrade!

Free Swap and Sell

If you have anything ham radio related, you can
swap it or sell it here. List your items for free.
Give a price and how to contact you. Send the
list to K8QIK@columbus.rr.com

2007-2008 Officers

President:
Charlie Snoke, N8KZN

Vice President:
Mark Urbine, KC8TUW

Treasurer:
Ed Campbell Sr., WD8PGO

Secretary:
Mary Travis, KD8EEI

Trustee:
John Hilliard, W8OF

Station Engineer:
John Hilliard, W8OF

Net Manager:
John Fick, KD8EEK

Activities Manager:
John Fick, KD8EEK

Public Relations:
Mark Urbine, KC8TUW

Flower Fund:
Ed Bennett, KD8EEJ

Web Master:
Robert Northrup, KC8PSW

**Chief Cook and Bottle
Washer:**
Charlie Snoke, N8KZN

Editor:
Jack Travis, AE8P
(740) 687-1985

April 3 Meeting Minutes

At 7:30 p.m. the meeting was called to order by President Charlie Snoke, N8KZN who lead the Pledge of Allegiance

There were 17 members present. There were four applications for second reading (Ben Doran, KD8FYS; Ket Doran, KD8GNX; Jay Cantieri, KD8HVW; George Skeelee, KD8GXV).

Officer Reports

Secretary Report: Mary Travis, KD8EEI

Minutes are posted in the Ragchewer. Motion to accept by Mark, KC8TUV and seconded by John, W8OF. Motion carried.

Treasurer's Report: Ed Campbell, Sr., WD8PGO

Ed gave the club financials. Motion to accept by Bob, KI8JM and seconded by John, W8OF. Motion carried.

VP Report: Mark Urbine, KC8TUV

Mark asked for club status and Ed, WD8PGO, said we were a 501 (C) 4 and Mark was going to check with Gannett Foundation to see if we still qualify for applying for a grant and will report back to club next month.

Trustee Report: John Hilliard, W8OF

Nothing to report

Committee Reports

VE Testing: Allan Sellers, KB8JLG

No report

Monday Night Net: John Fick, KD8EEK

April 7 John, W8OF

April 14 Charlie, N8KZN

April 21 ???John, W8AGS

April 28 ??

Mark, KC8TUV said he would be willing to do one if someone trained him.

Ragchewer: Jack Travis, AE8P

Nothing to report. Submit any article, news item, cartoon, or other ham related bits of trivia to Jack at k8qik@columbus.rr.com

Emergency Coordinator: Ed Campbell, WD8PGO

No report

Safety: Scott Snoke, WD8IXO

No report

Station Engineer: John Hilliard, W8OF

John reported that 443.875 are off the air until he can get it repaired.

Activities Manager: John Fick, KD8EEK

No 50-50 since John is in hospital. Mary, KD8EEI reported for John that he had a quote of \$61.77 for a 5 passenger SUV for May 17th if anyone is interested in car-pooling to the Dayton Hamvention.

Mary also reported that John wanted everyone to know that he monitors 147.030 if there is severe weather in the evening and he can pass any information to those who cannot make contact with 146.76.

John is asking for a volunteer who would be available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to monitor while he is working. Paul, KD8DDD said he would be willing to do this. Mary stated she would have John, KD8EEK follow up with Paul after John gets out of hospital.

Another question John, KD8EEK has is can we set up our own small mock disaster to see if our own internal procedures will work.

Flower Fund: Ed Bennett, KD8EEJ

In Ed's absence, Connie, N8LPC reported that she collected \$8.00 and the winner was Charlie, N8KZN and he put his portion back in flower fund.

Old Business:

Charlie reported that the antenna check had been completed and there were a couple of follow up items that would be completed in the next week.

New Business:

Charlie asked for show of hands to approve Ben & Ket Doran as new members. All in favor.

Charlie asked for show of hands to approve Jay Cantieri as a new member and all in favor.

Charlie asked for show of hands to approve George Skeelee as a family member of Joel Skeelee and all in favor.

Ed, WD8PGO asked for approval to pay insurance bill in the amount of \$615 (increase from \$591 last year). John, W8OF made motion to pay the bill and Don, WD8PCF seconded. All in favor.

Charlie stated the Fire Department would be out on April 7th to check out smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.

Charlie asked those who were going to attend the Athens Hamfest on April 27th to choose a number from 1 to 70 and one closest to number Charlie had written down would be winner of free ticket. Ed, WB8JBG won the ticket.

Charlie asked for volunteers to work from 9 a.m. to 12 noon on April 19th for the MS Walk. George, KB8USP; Dave, W8EZE; Gary, W8GTS; Sandy, KD8FTX; John, W8OF; Mary, KD8EEI volunteered.

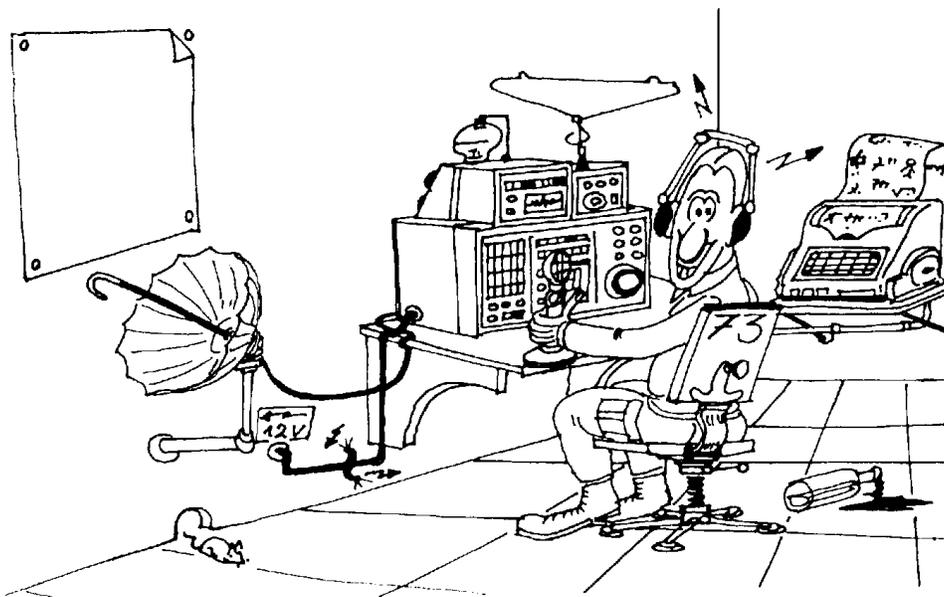
Ed, WB8JBG asked the club if he could borrow the tube tester from the basement and he was given permission to do so.

Gary, W8GTS made motion to adjourn, second Mark, KC8TUW. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Secretary, Mary Travis, KD8EEI

Antenna Wanted

Greg Boye, W8NGA is looking for a small tri-band (20-15-10 meter) antenna. Condition is not important as long as it's repairable. Contact Greg at Greg@Bowser.com or call 614-313-4498 and let him know what you have.



Upcoming Hamfests

April 20th is the 54th Cuyahoga Falls Amateur Radio Club hamfest in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Additional information is available at <http://www.cfar.org/hamfest2008.htm>

April 27th is the Athens County Amateur Radio Association Hamfest in Athens, Ohio. Additional information is available at <http://www.ac-ara.org>

May 11th is the 1st Annual Bucyrus Hamfest and Computer Show. Call Kenneth Cook, K8DZN at 419-834-0887 for details.

May 16-18th is the Dayton Hamvention in Dayton, Ohio. This is by far the biggest and best in the world. If you've never been there, you've missed something special. Additional information is available at <http://www.hamvention.org>

Tubes For Sale

If you need tubes for your boat anchor or TV contact Jeff Bell WD8JLI at 614-774-2973 or email at jbelle@imagearray.net he has a huge supply for most needs

E-mail Addresses

If you are currently receiving The Ragchewer via regular mail but have an Internet account, the Ragchewer can be sent to you and save the club some money. You'll also get your Ragchewer about a week

earlier. Send me your e-mail address and tell me to take you off the snail mail list.

If you have a new email address, be sure to also let me know. Send to K8QIK@columbus.rr.com

The Wayback Machine #22

by Bill Continelli, W2XOY

On March 4, 1929, Herbert Hoover, the former Secretary of Commerce who had helped Amateur Radio during its embryonic years, became President of the United States. Less than 8 months later, the Nation was thrown into the Great Depression. Stock prices fell 80%, the Gross National Product fell 50%, and unemployment was at 25%. It did not sound like a good time to waste money on a frivolous hobby such as amateur radio. And yet, the early 1930's was the period of the greatest growth in our history. From 1929's census of 16,829, amateur radio expanded 276% in 5 years, to a total of 46,390 in 1934. What was life like in our hobby 65 years ago?

QST was 25 cents per issue. One of the interesting columns in it was entitled "Calls Heard", which simply listed page after page of call signs heard by various stations reporting in. Each month hams would scan the hundreds of calls listed, to see if their signals had been noticed. One of the call signs listed was W2XAF, which was not an amateur station, but rather the shortwave relay of WGY, Schenectady. In fact, in the 1930's, there were so many broadcast stations with SW relays, that the Call book listed them in addition to amateur call signs.

Most of the ads in QST at that time were for components to construct your own station. Tubes, resistors and condensers (not capacitors), were displayed in full page ads. RCA and deForest were the dominant entities in the tube field. If you needed "A", "B" and "C" batteries, the Burgess Battery Company in Madison, Wis. could supply them. As the 1930's progressed, more companies appeared with kits or even assembled units. Hammarlund, then known as Hammarlund-Roberts Inc, made its debut with the "AC PRO", an 8 tube superhet receiver. National's new receiver was the SW-3. Radio Engineering Labs, known as REL, of Long Island City, supplied low cost transmitter and receiver kits. In 1931, one of these kits was at the center of a legal battle that went all the way to the Supreme Court. RCA, which held the deForest patents on the regenerative circuit, sued REL. Edwin Armstrong, who actually invented regeneration, but

lost a controversial court battle with deForest, saw this as an opportunity to win back his patent. He purchased 51% of REL's stock, and proceeded to fight the grand battle once more. Unfortunately, in 1934, the Supreme Court ruled that deForest, not Armstrong, was the inventor of regeneration.

Armstrong could take some small consolation that another of his inventions was finally put to good use in the amateur world -- super regeneration. Invented in the early 1920's, super regeneration provides very high sensitivity on AM signals. However, it has almost no selectivity, a very high noise level in the absence of stations, and radiated a broad interfering signal to nearby receivers. It was useless on MW or SW, but was perfect for the 5 meter band at 56 mc. During the early 1930's, Ross Hull, QST's Associate Editor, wrote many articles about 5 meters and the surprising propagation there. Many 'phone stations appeared on 56 mc, almost all used "supergenny" receivers, and some even operated full duplex.

If "UHF" 'phone doesn't interest you, how about amateur television? In 1931 you ask??? Unbelievably, the answer is yes!. In 1931 an article appeared in QST describing the "spinning disc" mechanical television system that had been around since the 20's. It was clumsy and crude, but it worked. The Jenkins Television Corp of Passaic, NJ, offered a "spinning Disc" kit in QST. Within 9 years however, the mechanical system was rendered obsolete by RCA's all electronic system.

The Madrid Conference was held in 1932. Unlike the 1927 Washington Conference, amateur radio was not in danger, and no frequencies were lost. 1932 also saw the expansion of the 'phone bands, but a special endorsement was needed to operate them.

The "Old Man" was still around, with his letters in QST about "rotten" operators, "rotten" band conditions, "rotten" stations, etc.. In fact, everything that didn't meet the Old Man's standards was "rotten". For the past 15 years he had been writing--no one knew who he was. Finally, when Hiram Percy Maxim died in 1936, the ARRL revealed that Maxim was indeed the Old Man. By the way, since H.P. Maxim,

W1AW, was still alive in the early 30's, the ARRL Station Call was W1MK.

Dealers included "Uncle" Dave Marks, whose first store was located at 115 North Pearl St in Albany, NY. This address is significant to me because the building I now work in stands on that site.

By 1934, the Federal Radio Commission was

superseded by the FCC, and a new license structure, with Class A, Class B, and Class C licenses, was in place. <<Class A, Class B, and Class C?? What goes around, comes around>>.

In our next installment, we will take a look at the late 1930's, particularly some events in 1938. I hope you can join me.

Toledo Hamfest

Mary KD8EEI, Jack AE8P and Allen KB8JLG went to the Toledo Hamfest on March 16, 2008. The trip, by way of Rte 23 to I-75, took a little over two and a half hours each way. The community center it was held in was very nice; warm, well lit and with a cushioned floor. Jack stated that it was about 70 percent or less of the size of last year's event and it was obvious that there were vacant areas in the table layout in the two large rooms (more than an acre). We got there at about 10AM and it took me a little over 2 hours to see everything.

I was looking for coax connector adaptors and found just about every combination imaginable, just not at the same table. My Male-BNC to Female SO239's cost \$3 each.

I plan on using one to connect a 2M handheld directly to a mag-mount vertical using low-loss RG8X cable and the other is available at my cost. . I also got two like-new aluminum 2 x 3 x 5 project boxes I can sell at my cost of \$2.50 each

There were several tables with Estate equipment for sale and I bought an HB NiCad charger and a 12V,

3A regulated power supply at very low prices. They also had several 2M older handhelds at a reasonable price but I did not try to bargain on them. The best deal was an older Yaesu 411 with charger and manual for \$40, others of the same brick-sized type were in the \$70 range. I did see a Tempo One HF transceiver sell for \$125. Although not suitable for Ham use, there was a new-in-box MFJ Super-ReGen all-band receiver for \$50. I was not looking for HF transceivers so I can't report on their availability.

R&L from Hamilton Ohio was there along with other dealers from Chicago and Indiana. An interesting comment from one dealer about ordering an MFJ product from him was...

He doesn't take orders for MFJ equipment because they won't give him a shipping date at the time of the order and won't reply to inquiries about orders placed. He said he doesn't need customers mad at him for their lack of support and their delivery times can be really long.

Regards, Allen KB8JLG

Notes for Amateurs Visiting Australia

According to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), Amateur Radio operators traveling to Australia who wish to operate in that country do not need to apply for an Australian Amateur Radio license.

Overseas amateurs visiting Australia must not operate an amateur station unless he or she identifies the station by use of the person's 'home' callsign, followed by the suffix VK to indicate location.

This new policy, effective February 15, 2008, allows amateurs who hold a non-Australian Amateur Radio license to operate up to 90 days under a Class License <<http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC1311>>; licensees who will be in Australia for more than 90 days will need to apply for an Australian

Amateur Radio license.

FYI, Australia license fees for amateur radio operators is

\$62 per year

\$121 for 2 years

\$180 for 3 years

\$240 for 4 years

\$299 for 5 years

Editors note: This is a significant change, as 3 1/2 years ago when my wife and I visited Australia for 2 weeks they wanted almost \$50 for a license for those 2 weeks.

Attending a wedding for the first time, a little girl whispered to her mother, "Why is the bride dressed in white?" "Because white is the color of happiness, and today is the happiest day of her life." The child thought about this for a moment, then said, "So why is the groom wearing black?"

It Was Always There

By Eric P. Nichols, KL7AJ

At a recent Arctic Amateur Radio Club board meeting, during a rare lull in the oft-heated discussions about how best to increase our membership, I threw out a simple question. "How did you get into ham radio?" The responses were revealing, to say the least. One by one, our board members, some young, some old, told the story of how they got into this hobby of all hobbies. One gentleman had a father who was a ham, and more or less forced him into the hobby, for which he was unspeakably grateful - years later, of course. One XYL saw a shortwave radio at a friend's house, started twiddling knobs, and got frustrated that she could only listen.

For her, the rest was history. A couple of others were exposed to amateur radio in high school, one in Boy Scouts. Another credited me with getting him into ham radio, much to my gratification. One other confessed that he didn't really know; it just seemed to him that ham radio was "always around."

Interestingly enough, not one of the hams entered the hobby because of a concentrated recruitment program. Although occasional public relations "Blitzkriegs" have their place in Amateur Radio, I'm not sure they produce lasting hams. Like many other clubs, we manage to get a lot of hams licensed, but the dropout rate is appalling.

The vast majority of our newly licensed hams never get on the air. I don't think our message is flawed; I think it's our delivery. Of all the board members I mentioned above, I believe the last fellow, the one who said ham radio was "always around" had the key. We need to get back to the place where amateur radio is a continual, if quiet, presence. People who get lured into the hobby, stick with the hobby.

People who get coerced and cajoled into the hobby leave as soon as we aren't looking.

The fact is, most new hams never see a working ham shack, about all they see is a handheld, which isn't all that fascinating. When a young person sees a ham shack equipped to cover everything from DC to daylight, they take notice...it doesn't matter whether they're a geek or not. I've never seen anyone who

wasn't impressed by a Moon bounce (Earth-Moon-Earth contact) array swinging around on its rotators...whether they had a clue what it was or not!

People don't know about ham radio because they don't see ham radio...except, perhaps at Field Day.

The best place to cultivate that "always around" feeling is in the schools. We need to infiltrate the middle and high schools again. Notice, I said, again. There was a time, not too long ago, when it was difficult to find a high school without a club station. Field Day should be a three hundred and sixty five day a year event, and that is easier to achieve in the schools than anywhere else.

There is no better way to teach science than with ham radio. We need to remind our public (and private) school teachers and administrators of that. We need to let our students get their hands grubby making things happen, rather than merely watching things happen. We need to get some real hardware into the schools. We have wonderful new allocations now, and the technology to use them is cheaper and easier than ever. When I was in high school in the late 60s, it was everything one could do, and then some, to do Moon bounce. It was only because we had a lunatic (no pun intended) electronics teacher, that we were able to pull off such a stunt. Now, Moon bounce is practically within reach of any determined high school club station.

Wouldn't it be great if Moon bounce stations proliferated at our high schools the way H.F. stations once did?

Of course, I only use Moon bounce as one radical example. We have exciting things happening down at 500 kHz, as well. What better way to learn weak signal, digital signal processing techniques than with our newly allocated MF experimental spectrum?

This all may be rocket science, but it doesn't take rocket science to get it into the schools! Our teachers want to see us excel in the sciences. Let's give them the tools to do so.

Fifty years from now, someone may be asked how they got into ham radio. It would be nice if they could answer, "I don't know...I guess it was always there."

Wanted – Propane Grill

Propane gas grill in usable condition for the clubhouse. If you know of anyone who is replacing their old grill with a new one, please ask if they would be willing to donate the old one to the club.

Get Your Community Involved

By Dan Romanchik, KB6NU

I often hear hams lament that their communities show little interest in amateur radio. While this may be true, hams have to realize that community involvement is a two-way street. To get communities involved in amateur radio, amateur radio needs to be involved with the community.

Let me give you an example.

In early 2006, I decided to become more involved in community service. On a road trip to the Marshall Hamfest, one of the guys in our club -- Jack, WT8N-- mentioned that he was a member of the Ann Arbor Rotary Club. I told him that I would be interested in joining, and he agreed to sponsor me.

I joined the club in March 2006. Shortly after I joined, the executive director of the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum (www.aahom.org) spoke to our Rotary Club. The Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum is a science museum that gives kids (and adults, too) real, hands-on experience with science and technology. There are, for example, exhibits that help kids learn about electricity, springs, weather, and other topics in science and technology.

As the director was speaking, the thought occurred to me that the museum would be a great place for an amateur radio station. I discussed my idea with Jack, and he agreed to work with me on the project. We then approached the museum director,

who is also a Rotary Club member, and met to discuss our idea.

As we discussed the idea, he became very enthusiastic about the possibilities. Our original idea was to set up a permanent station there, but as they were in the process of remodeling, this wasn't immediately possible. Instead, we operated a series of special events throughout the fall of 2007. These events have been very successful, and now we are discussing how and where to set up a permanent station at the museum. We expect this to happen some time in 2008.

We even have a vanity call sign for the station already--WA2HOM. A2 stands for Ann Arbor; HOM stands for Hands-On Museum. Look us up on QRZ.Com.

I'm sure that my involvement with the Rotary Club was a big part of the enthusiastic response to our proposal. Membership in the Rotary Club, and other community service clubs, such as Kiwanis or the Optimists, give one, if not instant credibility, at least some measure of it. There's no doubt in my mind that my involvement with the Rotary Club was a factor in the museum deciding to become involved with amateur radio.

Are you working on a community-service project or have questions about setting one up? Let Mark Urbine, KC8TUW know!

Cheap and Safe Rust Remover

By Mark Zelesky, KA9OOI

I came across a cheap and efficient rust remover that works very well and doesn't even pollute the environment. Most all of us have it in our kitchens at home.

The product I speak of is molasses. I was skeptical when I first heard about it, so I tried it on a gas tank from my old motorcycle. I had left some gas in the tank for quite a few years and when I moved recently, I checked the tank and found that the gas had turned rancid and the tank was completely filled with rust. I'm not saying a film of rust, but this was the heavy-duty industrial chunky kind of rust. I thought the tank was junk. So I mixed up a batch of the rust remover using

molasses and water and filled the tank to the very top.

The mixture is 1 part molasses and 9 parts water. I let the tank sit for 2 weeks and then rinsed it out with plain water. I couldn't believe it! Chunks of rust washed out of the tank by the handfuls and I was left with all new shiny metal on the inside.

The best part of it is that this is all natural and won't hurt the environment or stink up the house. The cost for doing the tank was 2 8oz bottles of molasses at 1.29 each. I am now using it to clean the rust off an old telegraph key and an old ball mount for a HF antenna. So if you have any old rusty metal parts from old radios or other things, give this a try. You will be surprised at the outcome.

Police Radio System Fails

Editors note: The following was sent to us by Jay, WD8HVW. Jay became a new member this month.

By David Gambacorta - Philadelphia Daily News

A YOUNG CRACK dealer unleashed a torrent of bullets from the dry-rotted window of his East Frankford flophouse, dropping two undercover narcotics cops in seconds.

On the bitterly cold night of Nov. 13, 2007, a veteran Highway Patrol officer was the first to reach one of the shot cops, who had a bullet lodged in his hip.

For 30 nerve-racking minutes, he used his Motorola police radio to try to talk to other officers while he transported the wounded cop.

Silence.

For 15 minutes, another cop racing from North Philadelphia to the shooting scene used her radio to find out what was going on.

Silence.

Finally, she used her cell phone.

The *Daily News* found that the radio problems in East Frankford that night were among more than a dozen other malfunctions, mix-ups and crashes that have occurred with the Motorola system since 2005 - the same year that city officials declared that they had fixed most problems with the \$62 million radio system.

Critics say that the system is still more complicated than firefighters and cops need it to be, and remains a serious liability in times of crisis.

Two years ago, in one of the most serious malfunctions, the Police Department had to rely on a backup system for three days, and kept officers in two-car teams because of safety concerns.

Problems continued as recently as March 15, when screeching noises were heard on radios in North Philadelphia and cops in the Northeast couldn't communicate with police dispatchers, police officials said.

Other critics say that the city has failed to act on several key recommendations that were included in a 2005 audit of the Motorola system done by the City Controller's Office.

"We literally have several binders and folders full of information about reported radio problems," said John McGrody, a Fraternal Order of Police vice president who investigates cops' complaints about the system.

"The bottom line is that the rank-and-file still have no confidence in the system. It's their main lifeline out there if they get in trouble, but you know what? Help can't arrive if the radios don't work. Someone's going to get hurt."

A rocky history

For more than three decades, police and firefighters in Philadelphia had relied on an analog radio system maintained by the city.

By the mid-1990s, city officials felt that the system was outdated, so they solicited proposals on a more modern radio system from Motorola, Ericsson-GE Corp. and E.F. Johnson. The city signed a contract with Motorola in 1999.

Three years later, cops and firefighters officially started using Motorola's 800-megahertz digital system, which came with a \$54.8 million price tag that later rose to \$62 million.

Motorola's system promised to be better in almost every way imaginable, offering, among other things:

_ Citywide coverage for portable radios carried by cops and firefighters.

_ Encryption technology that allowed cops and firefighters to talk on channels that criminals couldn't eavesdrop on.

_ Better radio coverage inside buildings.

_ Interoperability, a mechanism that would allow cops and firefighters to communicate directly with one another in event of a disaster.

But complaints arose immediately from cops and firefighters on the street.

The digital system, which used a computerized controller to assign talk space to users as it became available, had a major downside: If a bunch of cops or firefighters all tried to use their radios at the same time during an emergency, they heard busy signals, called "bonks."

The radios came with emergency buttons that were supposed to give cops or firefighters 10 seconds of clear air on all nearby radios, creating priority over all other transmissions.

But the emergency buttons were flawed, too. When firefighter Leon Phipps was trapped in a West Philadelphia house fire in April 2004, his emergency button didn't work when he screamed for help, he claimed afterward. Phipps, 53, suffered career-ending injuries in the blaze, and Motorola eventually settled a lawsuit with him.

In August 2004, Capt. John Taylor, 53, and firefighter Rey Rubio, 42, died in the basement of a Port Richmond rowhouse fire. Taylor's radio malfunctioned when he tried to call for help, according to a lawsuit that both men's families filed against Motorola in 2006.

The problems triggered City Council hearings, held in summer and fall of 2004. Officials found that cell-phone signals were blocking radio transmissions at 56 locations across the city because the cell signals were also operating on the 800-megahertz frequency.

City officials said that Nextel Communications Inc. was found to be the biggest commercial user of that frequency. Nextel was supposed to change frequencies beginning in 2005 - eliminating many busy signals - but the process has moved slowly.

"It's taking a lot of time. They're tough negotiators," said Frank Punzo, deputy commissioner of the Department of Public Property.

But Punzo noted that the city has successfully worked with Nextel to minimize cell-phone interference. "We're lucky if we hear of two dead spots a month, if that many," he said.

Motorola also altered a toggle knob on the portable

radios that had caused police and firefighters to end up on the wrong channel when they pressed the emergency button.

But the criticism didn't stop there.

'A higher failure rate'

Philadelphia police officers had nowhere near the amount of training on the new radio system that was needed, causing extra confusion, according to the 2005 audit.

The study, done by then-City Controller Jonathan Sidel, on the heels of the Council hearings, found that police officers only watched a 20-minute video about the new system, compared to the three hours of training recommended by Motorola.

"There was some validity to that," Police Communications Chief Inspector Michael Feeney said recently. "The problem is that it's logistically impossible to train 6,000 people who are never together at one time."

Police brass initially focused on training supervisors, who were supposed to then train their officers. But not all supervisors followed through.

In light of the controller's report, Feeney said, cops were offered individual training on the system.

"Believe me, I'm not trying to say that it was perfect, because it wasn't," he said. "If we had it to do over again, we would have done more training."

The audit also recommended that the city purchase portable repeater systems that could amplify radio signals for stronger reception in buildings and below ground - a critical issue to firefighters or cops who might become trapped or hurt in basements, like the late Capt. John Taylor and Rey Rubio.

Digital repeaters that would be compatible with Motorola's digital radio system were going to be available by 2006, the report said.

"Yet here we are, three years later. We still have problems with reliability, and the city hasn't implemented the recommendations the controller's office made," said Dave Kearney, a firefighter and recording secretary for firefighters' union Local 22.

Councilman Frank Rizzo, who co-sponsored the '04 hearings, said last week that he would "like to do legislation that would require repeaters to be put in all of the new high-rise construction projects in the city to support fire and police communications."

Punzo, though, said the digital repeaters that are on the market won't work on the city's 800-megahertz system.

The controller's report surprisingly found that there was no documentation to suggest that city officials - before shelling out \$54 million - had bothered to verify the effectiveness of Motorola's system by visiting other big cities that used it.

When Fire Department officials in Phoenix, Ariz., field-tested Motorola's system for eight weeks in 2004, they found that their old analog system held up better during emergencies.

The Motorola "digital . . . radios had a higher failure rate" and did not meet fire service standards, the Arizona

study said.

"Look, we're using a system that is not as reliable as the one we had in place," Kearney said. "Yeah, it has a lot more bells and whistles, but it's only good when it works."

'Sick and tired'

The most troubling incidents with the Motorola system over the past few years have involved the Philadelphia Police Department.

"Every cop in the street has a question in his or her mind about whether the radios will work or not when they really need it to," said the FOP's McGrody.

The two undercover narcotics cops were wounded on Orthodox Street near Josephine in East Frankford on Nov. 13, less than two weeks after Officer Chuck Cassidy was fatally shot interrupting a robbery in West Oak Lane.

"Then those two officers were shot, and we had a female officer who was trying to get out there from North Philadelphia," McGrody said.

"For 10 to 15 minutes, she couldn't broadcast on her radio. She had to use her cell phone twice to call other officers to find out what was going on out there."

At the shooting scene, the veteran Highway Patrol officer had already reached one of the wounded cops and planned to rush him to nearby Frankford Hospital-Torresdale.

"For 30 minutes, during an extremely critical time, he was unable to get through," McGrody said, the frustration growing in his voice.

"At that time, most of us were at Temple University Hospital, where the other officer had been taken. We knew we had another shot cop, but we had no idea where he was because that radio malfunctioned."

When the *Daily News* told Councilman Rizzo about the incident recently, he fumed.

"If we identify that there are more issues that are developing, we'll do a hearing again and get everybody back in the room," Rizzo said.

Punzo sent Rizzo an explanatory letter that included an analysis of the incident written by Motorola. Both notes said the problems had been caused by human error because nothing was wrong with the radio.

Punzo's note also stated that officers mistakenly change channels on their radios if they think it will enable them to be heard. "This just gets them lost in the system and contributes to their feelings of not being heard."

McGrody got angry when advised of Punzo's note to Rizzo.

"I am sick and tired of this pattern of trying to blame officers for radio malfunctions," McGrody said.

"It's actually insulting to continually blame the problems on firefighters and cops."

Deputy Police Commissioner Jack Gaittens insisted that the system functions well overall.

"People are still dissatisfied," Gaittens said, "but in terms of functionality, the system's OK. It's subject to mechanical breakdown, but we stay on top of Motorola.

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