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The communications center for the city of Cincinnati handles fire, police and 911 emergency calls. The center is on the third floor of the District 1 police building on Ezzard Charles Drive.

# Officials communicate need for new dispatching system

BY TERRY FLYNN  
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Cincinnati Police Chief Michael Snowden and Hamilton County Sheriff Simon Leis Jr. launched a campaign Monday for voter approval of a \$70 million countywide communications system.

Joined by other city and county officials, they met with *The Enquirer* editorial board Monday to explain the levy, which goes before voters on the May primary ballot.

Police and fire communications operations in Hamilton County are about 25 years behind the times and technology, they say, creating an unsafe situation for police officers on the street.

The solution, the officials say, is a \$70 million up-to-date city/county communications system. The way to pay for that system is by going to the voters for approval of a 1.09-mill, five-year levy.

Snowden said that, under the current system of dispatching and communicating for police and fire, different departments within the county responding to an emergency can communicate only with



Gustavson

those in their own department. Safety Director Bill Gustavson emphasized, "We've been lucky so far."

What the city and county officials want to buy with the \$70 million generated by the levy is a new trunk communications system using an 800-megahertz frequency that would allow communication between different departments.

It would replace the old 400-megahertz system which has been used here for more than 25 years.

"Every major city in Ohio has gone to (the newer) system except Cincinnati," Snowden said. "We feel this is an unsafe situation. Right now, for one department to communicate with another, they have to go through the different

dispatchers. With a new trunk system, officers from different departments could communicate immediately."

Although the weaknesses in the system have not resulted in any loss of life or appreciable property loss, Cincinnati

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The levy is backed by the county commission, Cincinnati City Council, the Hamilton County Municipal League, the Hamilton County Township Association, and county fire and police chiefs associations.

Ray Fern, county director of administrative services, said the levy would generate \$77.7 million, with \$7.7 million of that going for interest costs on the bonds which would be purchased and then paid off by the levy over five years.

Paula Knecht, communications chief for the city, said \$70 million would pay for all "backbone infrastructure and equipment for a new system.

That includes the equipment at the city and county dispatching centers, and the equipment for all the (police and fire) personnel."

Fern said the levy would cost an added \$33 a year for five years to the owner of a \$100,000 home.