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# ON THE AIRWAVES: Cities connect with residents by radio

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**BY KATHLEEN GRAY**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

When Southfield went looking among its employees for people to anchor broadcasts on its new emergency radio station, dozens of people applied.

Even with a limited chance for fame, many wanted a shot at talking to the city's 78,000 residents.

Southfield's station -- 1700 on the AM dial -- went live last month, using the voices of six employees. Many other communities are doing or considering the same thing -- buying a license for a radio station in order to communicate quickly with residents when things like the blackout of last August happen.

The Livonia City Council will consider such a proposal March 10.

"One issue we haven't done that well with is communicating with the public about some of the major incidents we've faced in the last eight years," said Alden Sawyer, director of emergency preparedness for Livonia.

Southfield officials took the proposal to the City

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### ON THE RADIO

Emergency community AM radio stations:

Ambassador Bridge, Detroit -- 1610

City of Lansing -- 530

City of Livonia -- 1670

City of Mt. Clemens -- 1660

City of Riverview -- 1650

City of Sterling Heights -- 1700

City of Southfield -- 1700

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Council several times but didn't get approval until a week after the Aug. 14 blackout that left more than 2.1 million people in southeast Michigan without power.

"Then it went very quickly," said Kathy Sherman, director of the city's public access cable TV station.

The \$18,000 cost to get the license and set up the station was paid for with a federal grant.

More than 200 communities nationally have received licenses for radio stations, said Bill Baker, president of Information Station Specialists, a Zeeland company that provides cities with the means to obtain stations.

The terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and the widespread blackout last summer helped convince 14 Michigan communities to get radio signals.

- City of Warren -- 1690
- City of Westland -- 1700
- Clinton Township -- 1610
- Isabella County, Mt. Pleasant -- 1610
- Mackinac Bridge at St. Ignace and Mackinaw City -- 1610 and 530
- St. Clair County -- 1620
- Village of Grosse Ile -- 1700

In Sterling Heights, Pat Lehman, director of community relations for the city, is the voice for 127,000 residents and offers tips for emergencies and information about road and water projects and upcoming community activities.

The systems, with a limited range, allow the National Weather Service to interrupt broadcasts. In Southfield, the Police Department dispatch can connect to the station to issue Amber Alerts or advise residents about road-closing accidents.

Contact **KATHLEEN GRAY** at 248-351-3298 or [gray@freepress.com](mailto:gray@freepress.com).

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