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Max Ortiz / The Detroit News

Grosse Ile Twp. Fire Department Chief Duncan Murdock in the Emergency Command Center, a system installed after the ATOFINA Chemical plant exploded July 14, 2001.

## Livonia stays tuned for crisis

1670 AM ready for emergency broadcasts

By Marisa Schultz / The Detroit News

**LIVONIA** — By the end of April, the city plans to have an \$18,000 radio system operating on station 1670 AM to provide residents with up-to-date details during emergency situations.

The need for a city-operated radio station became apparent after the Aug. 14-16 blackout, the largest in North American history, which stretched across eight U.S. states and Ontario and knocked out power for nearly 50 million people.

“Our weakest link in the emergency operation plan (during the blackout) was communication with residents,” Livonia Mayor Jack Engbretson said.

Residents couldn’t rely on the city’s cable TV station for news on how to get water and cool shelter. Livonia’s had to rely on commercial stations, such as WWJ-AM and WJR-AM, that needed to provide information to many other communities as well.

Livonia is joining a growing number of communities that have installed radio systems in the name of public safety, including Sterling Heights, Southfield and Grosse Ile. Warren, Clinton Township and Wyandotte also are setting up radio stations, said Bill Baker, founder and owner of Information Station Specialists in Zeeland, Mich., which installs the radio systems for communities.

The company has seen a dramatic increase in the number of communities seeking radio systems since the blackout, Baker said. Currently, about 200 communities nationwide have their own frequencies and 1,000 others are operating for airports, bridges, highways and national parks.

“The primary benefit emergency management people see is that they can speak directly with the citizens they are charged to protect,” Baker said.

During the blackout last year, Livonia resident Colleen Mills and her husband, George T. Mills, lit candles, boiled drinking water and turned on their battery-powered radio. If the city’s radio station had been available then, they would have used it.



Max Ortiz / The Detroit News

**Alden Sawyer, emergency preparedness director, left, and Livonia Mayor Jack Engbretson are ready to broadcast in an emergency.**

### At a glance

- \* The Livonia radio system should be operating by the end of April.
- \* Residents should tune in to 1670-AM for information about city activities.
- \* During emergencies, programming will be interrupted to provide information.
- \* The system should cost the city about \$18,000.

Source: City of Livonia

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 • New & Used Cars  
 • Employment  
 • Homes or Apartments  
 • Shop Online

Home Delivery Center  
 • Start home delivery  
 • Renew subscription  
 • Customer service



apartments.com

I want

Two bedroom

in

-Select area-

Go

You want what you want.

apartments.com

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“I think it sounds like a very good idea,” said Colleen Mills, a 57-year-old retired teacher. “And for \$18,000, it would be a wonderful idea. This is quite a big community and it’s great to have local emergency response” radio.

The radio will operate 24 hours a day with a 28-minute loop of programming. Different city department heads will have the chance to promote special items and events. If an emergency happens, the programming can be interrupted by a number of people who will have access to the station to provide information. For example, the mayor will be able to call in information from his cell phone if needed.

Mills hopes local grass-roots groups will get an opportunity to post information about their activities on the site.

In Grosse Ile Township, Fire Chief Duncan Murdock realized the need for emergency communication when the ATOFINA Chemicals plant exploded July 14, 2001. Three workers were killed and nine were injured. About half of the island community had to evacuate.

Township officials had to search through the Bresser’s (a phone book by street addresses) to call those affected. Emergency crews knocked on doors, telling people to leave the island. Police and fire’s departments were flooded with phone calls from concerned residents

After the explosion, the township installed a \$200,000 emergency communication system including six outdoor sirens, AM radio and a reverse 911 calling system. The calling system would have notified all the affected residents within minutes rather than hours had it been installed prior to the explosion, Murdock said.

Livonia is smart to get the radio system and will find it beneficial in communicating with residents, Murdock said.

“You are able to get information to residents in a timely fashion,” Murdock said.

The township has had to inform residents by sending out information. Residents should know to tune into the radio station 1700 AM immediately after hearing the siren.

In Livonia, the city has already been granted a permit to run its station by the Federal Communications Commission. Unlike a commercial radio station, it’s very easy to get a community-run station, Baker said. The application process takes two days and \$395. The radio station’s range is typically a three- to five-mile radius.

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There are more than a dozen emergency AM radio stations in Michigan. Among them:

**Ambassador Bridge, Detroit:** 1610

**Lansing:** 530

**Livonia:** 1670

**Mount Clemens:** 1660

**Riverview:** 1650

**Sterling Heights:** 1700

**Southfield:** 1700

**Warren:** 1690

**Westland:** 1700

**Wyandotte:** 1670

**Clinton Township:** 1610

**Isabella County, Mount Pleasant:** 1610

**Mackinac Bridge at Saint Ignace and**

**Mackinac City:** 1610 and 530

**Saint Clair County:** 1620

**Grosse Ile:** 1700

Source: Information Station Specialists

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