

Columbia 911 Communications District

Radio Disruption December 27, 2021

After Action Report

On Monday morning December 27th the District experienced a disruption of service of the public safety radio system. The following is a recap of events prior to and during the events of that morning.

BACKGROUND:

Starting the weekend of December 18th, local and national weather service reporting entities began to predict a winter weather event for the NW Oregon and SW Washington region.

December 23rd, the State of Oregon Governor declared a State of Emergency commencing on the 23rd and extended to January 3rd of 2022. Expectations were varied as to how much snow would fall and to what extent below freezing temperatures would fall. It was estimated that snow at the valley floor level would take place and that temperatures could be in the low teens.

The Columbia 911 Communications District conducts its winter season preventative maintenance checks and generator fueling operations during the months of September and October.

Snow began to fall across the region on Friday evening December 24th with an increase in precipitation and the lowering of temperatures through Christmas day and night.

By Monday morning the 27th, there were multiple inches of snow at the valley floor across the region and within Columbia County many inches up to and over a foot within the inner portions of the county.

Monday December 27:

At 06:58 the initial notification of a problem was raised at the 911 center. Reports of radio disruption or loss of communication with units were reported.

On-duty staff paged 911 District managers.

06:59 - the Director responded to the page and began his drive to the district office.

07:00 - the Operations Manager and the Technical Manager were all engaged in either responding to the office or were on telephones with vendors.

07:05 – Day Wireless was contacted

07:27 – Confirmation that L-1 and F-1 were operating on back-up radios which provided 2-way communication between Dispatch and law and fire /EMS users in the Scappoose, St. Helens and Columbia City area.

Telephone notifications were made to outlying agencies.

07:57 – Call with Day Wireless, status check. Crews are responding. Trying to reach Columbia Heights.

08:26 – Call between C911 Director & Operations Mgr.

08:19 - Call between C911 Director & Operations Mgr. Updates

08:42 – Day Wireless technicians arrived at the Columbia Heights site. They noted that the site was operating on commercial power and the radio system was showing alarms on the microwave system between the Clatskanie and Columbia Heights sites.

08:50 – Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director

08:54 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director. Suspect problem is at Clatskanie. Due to the weather and heavy snow conditions, DW will need a snow cat or side by side vehicle to make it to the site. Searching for appropriate vehicles.

09:08 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director

09:30 – Call between C911 Director & ODOT

09:47 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director. Snow cat found, need to drive to Estacada shop and transport to base of Clatskanie Mtn.

11:20 - Call between C911 BOD Anderson and C911 Director

12:42 - per system report logs, it appears that the Clatskanie site lost commercial power at 17:00 on Sunday (26th). Suspect the generator has not fired and the UPS system has been exhausted.

12:58 – Call between C911 BOD Anderson and C911 Director

13:01 Message to all users

Hi Chief,

Yes, we are experiencing a radio issue. Sorry for the delay in getting this email out. We have been concentrating on solving the issue. We have made telephone notifications to Clatskanie, West Port, Mist-Birkenfeld and Vernonia who are most impacted by our current outage.

For the Scappoose, St Helens & Columbia City area we are operating on our BACKUP radio system. We are sending out tones for all calls regardless if we know (or not) if a station and pagers can hear us. This also activates Active911 so those should be being received by fire staff.

The issue has been narrowed down to the Clatskanie site. We do know that commercial power is out in the entire area of Mist which includes our site. At that site is a UPS, generator and 2 thousand gallons of propane. Our assumption is that the generator did not auto start upon loss of commercial power. This is only an assumption at this time and needs to be confirmed. Day Wireless is enroute however it is by snowcat which had to be acquired and transported.

I'm in constant contact with Day Wireless and will be sending out updates as they are received.
Mike

13:07 – Call between C911 BOD Anderson and C911 Director

14:19 - Call between C911 BOD Anderson and C911 Director

16:01 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director

16:03 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director

16:10 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director, techs have arrived at the Clatskanie site. Radio system is fine. Found the generator battery at low power (5.6 amps). Crew will go back down the hill and cannibalize their service truck and return to the mountain top and place it into the generator. A second crew will bring replacement batteries and conduct a meet and swap.

16:14 – Email to all user agencies with the above update. “Good Afternoon,
I just hung up from Day Wireless. Their crews have made it to the Clatskanie site via snowcat. The radio system is sound. The problem is associated with the generator and specifically a battery that has drawn down too low to be able to turn the generator.

The crew is going back down the hill and pulling a battery from their service truck and will install it in the generator. A second crew is retrieving two new batteries and will coordinate a meet with the first crew.

I will keep you posted as events unfold.

Mike”

16:20 - Call between C911 Director & ODOT with update and findings.

16:35 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director

17:50 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director

18:00 – Email to all District agencies with update “Day Wireless continues to work the issue. Power was returned and failed again after just a minute or two.

I’m waiting for an update.”

18:05 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director

18:10 Email to all District agencies with update,

“Our Clatskanie site is back up and running. It is running on emergency generator power.

The Day Wireless crew ran into Western Oregon Electric work crews who shared that they expect to continue repair work tomorrow and hopefully we will resume commercial power there after.

Keeping our fingers crossed.
Mike”

18:19 - Call between Day Wireless and C911 Director

Conclusions:

A new battery was installed with the generator. A second new battery was placed inside the shelter attached to a trickle charger.

Knowing that the Clatskanie site has been running for several days on the generator alone, the District has made arrangements for a re-fueling for the propane tanks.

The District recognizes the delay in communicating to the user agencies of the system disruption the morning of the failure and will strive to better communicate in a more timely manner should future incidents occur.