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Hewitt: Chiefs say new radio system was worth it



(Photo by Matthew Ablon) (KWTX)

By Rissa Shaw

Published: Jun. 30, 2018 at 1:48 AM CDT

A pricey new purchase has paid off for the City of Hewitt, according to the city's top public safety officials.

A week after one of the largest, and most dangerous, fires McLennan County has had all year, the fire and police chiefs in Hewitt said their new radio system was a success.

"It worked well," said Fire Chief Lance Bracco. "This is one of the biggest grass fires we've been on in a while."

The 175-acre blaze that straddled the Lorena-Hewitt line demanded the attention of at least ten fire and police agencies from around the county who all needed to communicate with each other.

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"It was the real reason why we needed this radio system," said Police Chief Jim Devlin.

The multi-agency event put the city's new 800 digital radio system to the test.

"Our engine... which was serving our city because we had some houses which we thought the fire was coming towards... I was able to talk to them... (his firefighters on the engine), and Lorena's command and our brush trucks all at the same time," said Bracco.

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Prior to May 31, Hewitt was on an older system that prevented direct radio communication with many other agencies in the county, said Devlin, adding that the "antiquated" system wouldn't allow the city's own police officers and firefighters to radio each other if they were too far away or inside of a building.

Devlin said plugging into Waco's "core" system makes their radios more powerful and reliable.

Last Friday's fire was the first major, multi-response event since they went live with the system, and Devlin said it went off without a hitch.

"It worked fantastic, we were able to talk to every entity that was out there," said Devlin.

"I could flip over to the fire channel talk to Chief Bracco who then spoke to fire command and then we could relay that information back and forth, it was readily available, it was accessible, things happened instantaneously because we had the information and the communication to flow back and forth, and we also were able to communicate and listen to the S.O. (Sheriff's Office) and the other law enforcement entities that responded out there as well."

The chiefs said the \$750,000 system was worth every penny.

"Every second that we can save in communicating with one another, that's a potential life or property to be saved," said Devlin.

Two of the Hewitt firefighters working the wildfire to save lives and property were sent to the hospital for dehydration and smoke inhalation, however, they both recovered quickly and are back on-duty.

No citizens were injured.

No homes were damaged.

Lorena fire officials said the grass fire was caused by field shredding.

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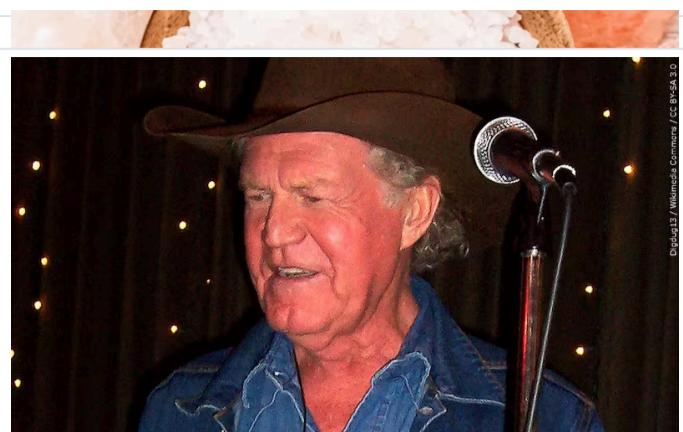


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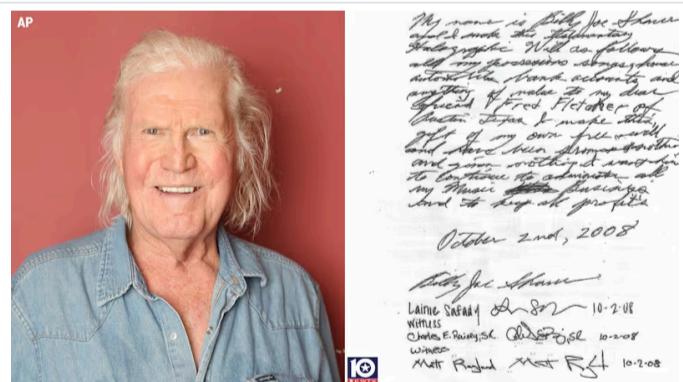
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My name is Billy Joe Shaver
and I make the Holygrophic
Will as follows:
all my possessions, savings, house
and all the land, ectomys and
anything I made to my dear
friend of Fred Fletcher off
Golden Draper & make him
the 1st and 2nd and 3rd and 4th
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