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MEDIA RELEASE

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Rockford Police to Implement Radio Channel Encryption to Improve Police Officer Safety, Public Privacy Rights, and Crime Fighting

Rockford, Ill. – The Rockford Police Department will switch to a fully encrypted system for all of its radio transmissions later this year. The switch, which is anticipated to go into effect in August, will result in information received through traditional analog scanners and cell phones used by the public and news media to cease.

Police agencies across the country have begun adopting the growing trend of encrypting police radio traffic citing officer safety and public privacy rights as top concerns.

Rockford Police Chief Dan O’Shea agrees, “While an open radio system offers a sense of transparency for citizens and news media, the risk of criminals using the same technology to monitor law enforcement channels jeopardizes officer safety. Ultimately, the safety of my officers, the safety of the public, and the public privacy rights of citizens are my primary concerns. Encrypting police radios will be a significant tool in eliminating risk to the officers, protecting privacy rights of citizens, and not tipping off criminals we are trying to apprehend by providing them with a real-time, play-by-play of officer tactics.”

A simple download of a cell phone scanner app allows for anyone, anywhere to receive police communications, including officer locations, police intelligence and pending activities. Also noted as primary reasons for the move to encryption include security breach prevention and ensuring investigations are not compromised.

“An additional concern of using open police frequencies is that ongoing investigations can be compromised when sensitive or inaccurate information is disseminated prematurely. Open frequencies also allow personal identifying information of private citizens (i.e. birthdate, full name, home address) to be compromised during a time when identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes across the country,” Chief O’Shea continued. “The encryption of radio channels will allow us to secure scenes and disseminate vetted information to the public which will help avoid the

misrepresentation and misinterpretation that often occurs as incidents that are just coming in over the air are heard.”

The department’s information sharing on its Police Blotter, <http://rockfordil.gov/police/police-blotter.aspx>, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/RockfordIllinoisPoliceDepartment/>, and Twitter, <https://twitter.com/RockfordPD> pages will continue. Citizens are also encouraged to subscribe to Nixle, <https://nixle.com/register/>, a geographically targeted community information service that allows the City to distribute real-time alerts and advisories via text and email. Crimemapping.com is another tool citizens can use to alert them to recent crime activity in specific neighborhoods.

Transparency remains a high priority for the department who will work with local media partners over the next several weeks to ensure public access to information continues. Dissemination methods still to be finalized include automated reports and push feeds, a new CAD/911 call log, and a dedicated media line.

“This transition is another step in equipping the department to achieve the collective goal of a stronger and safer community,” O’Shea concluded.

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