



OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Review of the U.S. Park Police's Communications Recording System in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area

Review of the U.S. Park Police's Communications Recording System in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area

Results in Brief

What We Reviewed

We initiated this review of the U.S. Park Police's (USPP's) communications recording system used for operations in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area (WMA) after the USPP discovered it had not recorded radio communications during an operation to clear Lafayette Park in Washington, DC, on June 1, 2020. We assessed the analog recorder the USPP was using when it discovered the recording failures in June 2020 and the digital recorder that the USPP subsequently installed in October 2020. We examined whether the USPP has had problems capturing recordings for its primary dispatch radio channel and its two secondary radio channels: the "admin" channel and the special events channel. Because the phone lines for the USPP dispatch operations center, like the USPP's radio communications, are required to be recorded, we also examined any problems the USPP has had recording its phone lines.

U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) policy requires the USPP to record all radio and phone communications to help support public safety and law enforcement needs. These recordings allow dispatchers to instantly play back radio communications or phone calls in emergency situations, and prosecutors frequently use the recordings as evidence.

What We Found

We found that, notwithstanding DOI requirements, the USPP failed to record radio communications from its admin channel from October 2018 through June 2020 and from its special event channel from at least March 2018 through August 2020. In contrast, we found that the USPP continuously recorded radio communications from its primary dispatch channel and dispatch center phone lines from 2018 through August 2020, when the analog recorder was replaced.

We found that the USPP's analog recorder appeared to have stopped fully working some time in 2018 and that because the USPP did not have any policies or procedures ensuring that it monitored its recorder, it did not discover the deficiency until June 2020 when USPP officials requested recordings from the June 1 operation. We did not find evidence suggesting that the USPP intentionally failed to record its radio communications.

Moreover, technical problems now prevent the USPP from accessing recordings stored on the USPP's analog recorder, so the USPP cannot meet its records retention obligations for recordings on that device.

We also found that, after discovering the analog recorder had stopped working but before installing a new digital recorder, the USPP used an ineffective, temporary recording solution from August through October 2020 that did not comply with DOI policy. We confirmed several instances in which officers sought recordings in connection with criminal prosecutions that occurred while this temporary recording solution was in place, but the USPP could not successfully fulfill those requests.

Furthermore, we found that the USPP took over 2 years to install its digital recorder. The evidence showed that the USPP obtained the digital recorder in September 2018, but insufficient planning, delays in obtaining necessary security approvals, and installation challenges resulted in the USPP relying on its outdated analog recorder until October 2020 when it completed installing the digital recorder. The USPP believed that, once installed, the digital recorder began working immediately. The evidence showed, however, that it did not record its radio communications for 2 weeks.

Our review determined that the digital recorder has regularly recorded all radio and phone communications in the dispatch center since October 23, 2020. Still, we found the USPP's digital recorder does not fully comply with DOI policy because the USPP has not set up the recorder to instantly play back radio or phone communications, a critical feature dispatchers need in emergency situations. The USPP faces other ongoing challenges with the recorder, to include monitoring and maintenance, records retention, and IT approvals.

What We Recommend

Based on our findings, we recommend the USPP define roles and responsibilities for maintaining and monitoring dispatch center IT equipment, evaluate and implement available features of the digital recorder that can assist in monitoring system functionality, review the digital recorder's retention settings and assess retention procedures for recorded communications, identify and obtain the required IT approvals for all dispatch center IT equipment, and evaluate and implement any maintenance needed for its digital recorder to ensure proper functionality and compliance with DOI policy.



I. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We initiated this review after the U.S. Park Police (USPP) found it had not recorded its radio communications during an operation to clear Lafayette Park in Washington, DC, on June 1, 2020. We focused our review on the USPP's radio recording system used for USPP operations in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area (WMA), which is located at the USPP's dispatch operations center in its Anacostia Operations Facility in Washington, DC.¹

As part of our review, we interviewed more than 35 current and former officials and contractors from the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), including personnel from the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO); the Office of the Solicitor; the National Park Service (NPS), which oversees the USPP; and the USPP. We also collected and reviewed emails and documents from OCIO, NPS, and USPP personnel, and reviewed relevant OCIO, NPS, and USPP policies and procedures and congressional testimony. Additionally, we conducted a forensic analysis of the USPP's retired analog recorder and reviewed radio recording logs and recordings from the USPP's current digital recorder.

We reviewed the recording systems the USPP has used from 2018 to the present. While the USPP used its analog recorder from 2009 to August 2020, we focused on the period beginning in 2018 based on evidence we obtained showing that the recording problems began when the USPP switched to a new radio system that year. We provided information outside of that timeframe when useful for context.

We conducted this review in accordance with the "Quality Standards for Investigations" issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency to ensure our work adhered to appropriate professional standards.

II. RESULTS OF REVIEW

A. Background

1. The USPP's Radio System and Dispatch Center in the WMA

The USPP's radio system and the dispatch center personnel who direct communication across the system in the WMA provide the support required to facilitate accurate, real-time communication and decision making for USPP officers and ensure officer and public safety. Dispatchers' responsibilities include managing the USPP's radio communications between USPP law enforcement personnel and with other Federal, State, and local agencies. Dispatchers likewise coordinate emergency law enforcement, medical, and fire assistance for incidents reported by officers and the public.

USPP dispatchers also answer emergency phone calls. The USPP's dispatch center generally does not receive direct emergency phone calls from the public.² It does, however, receive emergency

¹ We did not review the USPP's dispatch centers or recording systems in New York, NY, or San Francisco, CA.

² The USPP dispatch center sometimes receives direct emergency calls if a caller dials the phone number for the dispatch center, which is posted on some park signs and on the USPP's website, or if a caller uses one of the NPS' emergency phones available in some areas. The dispatch center can also receive direct calls via a nonemergency phone number.

911 calls transferred by other jurisdictions' 911 centers when the emergency is occurring within the USPP's jurisdiction, which spans several hundred square miles across Federal parklands and roadways in Washington, DC; Virginia; and Maryland. Emergency calls can include reports of medical emergencies, criminal activity, and traffic accidents.

Operationally, the USPP uses three main radio channels to communicate among its personnel—a primary dispatch channel and two secondary channels: the “admin” channel and the special events channel.³ The USPP uses the dispatch channel for regular patrol activities. It generally uses one of the secondary channels when there are demonstrations or other special or significant events, such as a parade or serious traffic accident in the Washington, DC area. The USPP uses the secondary channels in these situations so that communication for regular patrol activities can continue on the primary dispatch channel without disruption.

To comply with Federal and DOI technology requirements and to address inadequate radio coverage across the WMA that posed officer safety concerns, in 2016, the USPP began to acquire the equipment and services needed to switch the radio system from analog to digital. This change cost almost \$2 million.

While installing and testing the digital system, the USPP continued to use its analog radio system until September 2018. At that time, the analog system suddenly failed and forced the USPP to switch to its current digital system. The digital system relies on the infrastructure of the radio system operated by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).⁴

Appendix 1 includes a timeline of events discussed in this report.

2. DOI Policies Require USPP Dispatch Centers To Record and Retain Law Enforcement Radio Communications and Dispatch Center Phone Calls

DOI policy requires all DOI law enforcement officers engaged in public safety law enforcement duties to have reliable access to an adequately staffed and equipped public safety dispatch center.⁵ The policy further states that all dispatch centers must have “[a]utomated recording equipment . . . to provide for continuous recording and instantaneous playback of all public safety radio transmissions as well as all incoming public safety telephone calls.”⁶

Further, recording radio and phone communications supports public safety and law enforcement

³ The USPP also has a fourth “line of sight” radio channel that allows officers to speak with other officers nearby. Because the radio signal travels directly between the officers’ radios, those communications cannot generally be recorded.

⁴ The USPP uses a digital radio network maintained by the DOJ and physical space at some DOJ facilities across the WMA to position radio equipment needed to operate the USPP’s radio system.

⁵ 446 *Departmental Manual (DM)* 16, “Law Enforcement Radio and Telecommunications Systems,” dated March 9, 2016, and its corresponding “Law Enforcement Handbook.” The version of 446 *DM* 16 posted in the DOI’s central online policy repository, the Electronic Library of the Interior Policies (ELIPS), is dated October 2000. However, the DOI’s Office of Law Enforcement and Security (OLES), which manages this policy, implemented an updated version in March 2016 that is available on its Law Enforcement Portal and accessible to DOI personnel. The 2016 version is labeled as “Interim,” but the OLES’ policy website states that interim policies are “in effect” and have been approved by the OLES Director. We briefed the OLES on this discrepancy in December 2021. The OLES told us it is aware of the issue and the need to address it. As of February 2022, however, ELIPS continues to list only the 2000 version. In this report, we refer to the current 2016 version when discussing 446 *DM* 16.

⁶ Our office of Audits, Inspections, and Evaluations is currently evaluating whether the DOI effectively administers its radio program across its bureaus.

needs. For example, USPP personnel told us that dispatchers need the ability to instantly playback recordings of radio communications or phone calls in emergency situations where a caller cannot repeat what was said. Radio and phone recordings are also frequently used as evidence in investigations and prosecutions. USPP personnel stated that the recordings are an important tool for dispatch center supervisors to monitor dispatcher performance, resolve complaints from the public, and analyze radio reception issues across the USPP's area of responsibility.

NPS records retention standards require the USPP to keep recordings of dispatch center radio and phone communications regarding routine incidents or activities for at least 3 years.⁷ Depending on the nature of the incident discussed in the communication, that period can increase to up to 25 years or materials can be designated as permanent records.

3. The USPP Discovered It Did Not Have Radio Recordings From Its Law Enforcement Operations on June 1, 2020

Following the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, MN, protests began across the United States, including in and around Lafayette Park in Washington, DC, on May 29, 2020. Lafayette Park is an NPS-managed historic park adjacent to the White House that is patrolled by the USPP. On the evening of June 1, 2020, the USPP, with assistance from several other State and Federal law enforcement partners, cleared protestors from the area.⁸ Protests in Washington, DC, continued until June 3, 2020.

On June 6, 2020, a USPP official requested radio recordings from each day of the protests from May 29 to June 3. Specifically, the official sought recordings from the USPP's primary dispatch channel for May 29 and May 30, as well as recordings from the USPP's admin channel for May 30 to June 3. The USPP explained that it used the dispatch channel to communicate on May 29 into the morning of May 30 but that it activated a special detail of officers to work the protests who used the admin radio channel to communicate from May 30 to June 3.

On June 10, 2020, dispatch center personnel determined that recordings for the primary dispatch channel—used for activity on May 29 and May 30—were available. They determined, however, that the admin channel—used for USPP operations on May 30 to June 3—had not been recorded.

After confirming that it did not have recordings from May 30 to June 3, the USPP prepared two internal briefing documents—one in July 2020 and one in October 2020—for the USPP's executive command staff. The documents stated that during the USPP's transition from the analog radio system to its digital radio system in 2018, the USPP's admin radio channel and phone lines were not configured to record "for unknown reasons."⁹ These documents further stated that dispatch center personnel did not know before June 10, 2020, that the admin channel was not recording because they had not previously received a request for recordings from that channel. The October briefing document stated that the USPP had installed a new digital recorder that became operational on October 7, 2020, and would record all USPP radio and phone communications in the dispatch center as of that date.

⁷ NPS Records Schedule, N1-79-08-2, Protection and Safety, Item 2 (Feb. 2010).

⁸ Our office reviewed the USPP's actions on June 1, 2020, and issued a report in June 2021. See DOI OIG, *Special Review – Review of U.S. Park Police Actions at Lafayette Park*, No. OI-PI-20-0563-P (June 8, 2021).

⁹ USPP Briefing Statement (July 8, 2020); USPP Briefing Statement (Oct. 8, 2020).

B. Findings

Our review of the USPP's radio recording issues included an assessment of the USPP's analog recorder that it was using when it discovered it did not have recordings of its radio communications from the security operations in Lafayette Park in May and June 2020. We also reviewed the USPP's current digital recorder that was subsequently installed in October 2020.

We found that, contrary to DOI policy, the USPP failed to record two of its three radio channels for more than 2 years—from at least March 2018 through August 2020. We also found that after discovering the recording failures in 2020, the USPP implemented an ineffective temporary recording solution that did not comply with the requirements of 446 DM 16. In addition, we learned that the USPP took over 2 years to install its current digital recording system. We further concluded that, although the USPP has been regularly recording its communications since late October 2020, its digital recorder does not fully comply with DOI policy and faces other ongoing challenges. Based on those findings, we make five recommendations to improve the USPP's radio operations.

1. The USPP Was Required To Record All of Its Radio Communications But Did Not Do So for More Than 2 Years

We found that the USPP failed to record radio communications from its admin channel from October 2018 through June 2020 and from its special event channel from at least March 2018 through August 2020. These deficiencies violated DOI policy requiring that the USPP record all law enforcement radio communications. In contrast, we found that the USPP continuously recorded radio communications from its primary dispatch channel and dispatch center phone lines from 2018 through August 2020, when the analog recorder was replaced.

We also determined that because the USPP did not regularly check its analog recorder during this time, dispatch personnel only discovered in June 2020—when a USPP official requested recordings from the demonstrations in Washington, DC—that activity had not been recorded. We did not find evidence suggesting that the USPP intentionally failed to record communications from the demonstrations in Washington, DC, in May and June 2020.

Finally, we determined that because technical issues no longer allow the USPP to access any recordings stored on the analog recorder, the USPP cannot meet its records retention obligations for recordings on that device.

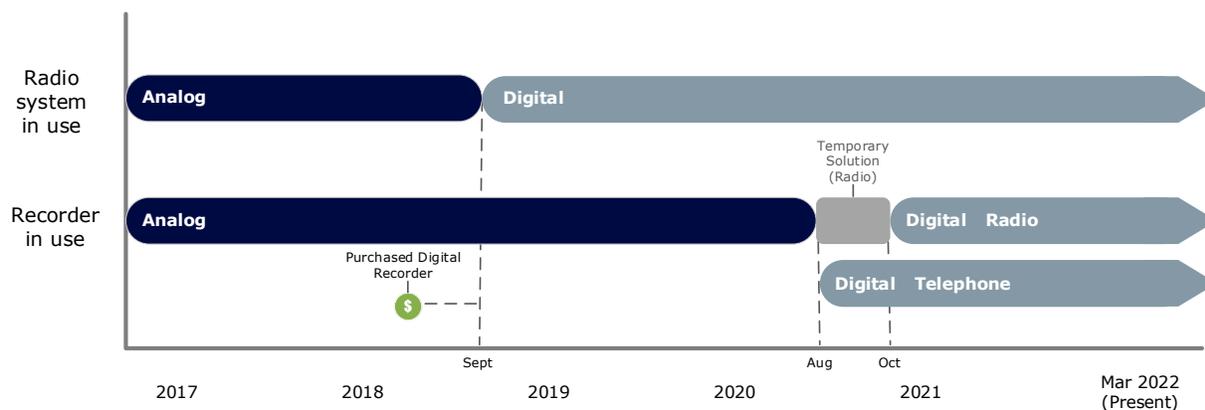
We discuss these findings in more detail below.

a. The USPP's Analog Recorder Appears To Have Stopped Fully Working in 2018

The USPP switched from its analog radio system to a digital system in September 2018 but continued to use its analog recorder until August 2020. (See Figure 1 for a timeline of the USPP's use of its different radio systems and recorders.) We received conflicting information regarding whether the analog recorder was fully operational and recording all three radio channels and phone

lines when the USPP initially connected it to the digital radio system in 2018.¹⁰

Figure 1: Timeline of USPP Use of Its Radio and Recording Systems in the WMA



Source: DOI OIG analysis of USPP information.

To assess those discrepancies, we conducted a forensic analysis of the analog recorder and discovered that the hard drive containing the recordings had become corrupted and inaccessible.¹¹ We also determined that the manufacturer had discontinued selling the analog recorder in 2011 and had ceased all support for the recorder in 2014. We could, however, access and review the separate logs made by the analog recorder of the radio transmissions and phone calls it received.¹²

Based on our review of the logs and contemporaneous emails of dispatch center staff, we determined that the analog recorder did not record the admin radio channel from October 2018 through June 2020, which violated 446 DM 16.¹³ We found that the analog recorder was initially recording the admin channel in September 2018 when the analog recorder was connected to the

¹⁰ According to the USPP, a former USPP radio employee and radio contractor connected the analog recorder to the USPP's new digital radio system in 2018 and set up the analog recorder system to record the dispatch channel at that time. The USPP concluded, however, that those individuals never configured the analog recorder to record the admin channel or the dispatch center's phone lines. The former employee and the contractor, however, recalled connecting the analog recorder to record all three radio channels and phone lines. Contemporaneous emails from October and November 2018 by the radio employee and an IT division official also suggested that, at that time, they believed the dispatch and admin channels, as well as the phone lines, were being recorded.

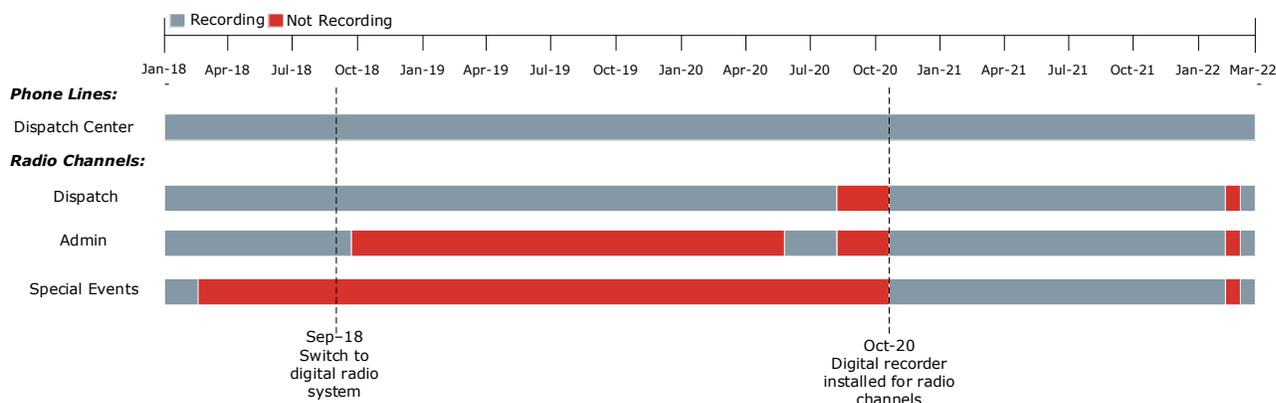
¹¹ During the course of this review, dispatch center staff could initially access recordings on the analog recorder but later encountered errors that prevented them from logging in. The USPP hired the contractor that had previously serviced the device to address this issue and allow the USPP to log in, but that effort was unsuccessful. During our subsequent forensic review, we found that the analog recorder had become corrupted; in particular, we learned that the recorder's hard drive that stored the audio recordings was encrypted, but the decryption key to unlock the hard drive was no longer stored in the typical location on the system. The manufacturer's instructions for the recorder recommended that the encryption key be backed up, but no IT or radio personnel we interviewed could locate any backup key.

¹² The analog recorder's logs automatically documented any system activity as it occurred, and the logs were stored separately from the actual recordings. Even though we could not listen to the recordings to confirm they were made, we concluded, based on our analysis of how logging functioned on the analog recorder and on our review of contemporaneous emails that were consistent with activity reflected in the logs, that the logs provided a reliable indicator of what radio and phone communications the system had recorded. As such, the logs provided useful information of the timing and volume of communications but not the substance of those communications.

¹³ The USPP has stated that for demonstrations or other events, it has implemented a practice that the dispatcher working that event keeps a handwritten log of the USPP's radio communications. The USPP has such logs from demonstrations in May, June, November, and December 2020. While the logs may serve as a useful backup source of information, they do not satisfy the requirement in 446 DM 16 that all radio communications be recorded.

digital radio system, but our review of the logs showed that recording stopped by the end of October 2018. We could not determine through witness interviews or our review of documents what caused the admin channel to stop recording. The logs also showed that the analog recorder did not record the admin channel again until June 16, 2020, when a contractor fixed the recorder. After the recorder was fixed, it recorded the USPP’s admin channel until August 2020, when the USPP stopped using the analog recorder and shifted to the digital recorder. (See Figure 2 for a timeline of when the USPP recorded its dispatch center communications.)

Figure 2: Timeline of the USPP’s Recording of Its Dispatch Center Communications, January 2018 Through March 15, 2022



Source: DOI OIG analysis of USPP information.

Regarding the USPP’s special events channel, we determined that channel had not been regularly recorded since at least March 2018, when the USPP was using the analog radio system (see Figure 2).¹⁴ In addition, the special events channel had not been properly configured to record when the analog recorder was connected to the digital radio system in September 2018.¹⁵ Moreover, the contractor who repaired the analog recorder on June 16, 2020, informed the USPP at that time that the special events channel had not been recording and that he was unable to fix that channel. The USPP’s failure to record its special events channel also violated DOI policy.

The analog recorder logs showed that the device continuously recorded communications on the USPP’s dispatch radio channel and dispatch center phone lines since the switch to the digital radio system in September 2018 (see Figure 2). We corroborated this through a review of emails from 2018 through 2020, which showed that dispatch center personnel consistently fulfilled requests for dispatch channel and dispatch center phone recordings throughout that time.¹⁶

¹⁴ We did not collect data from earlier than January 2018, so we do not know the recording status before that time.

¹⁵ The logs show a brief period in August to September 2018 where some transmissions on the special events channel may have been intermittently recorded. The radio repair contractor told us that the low number of recordings may reflect that the analog recorder was recording system noise rather than actual radio transmissions. Regardless, the logs show recordings stopped by the end of September 2018 and did not begin again.

¹⁶ Although the USPP’s October internal briefing document stated its phone lines had not been configured to record on the USPP’s analog recorder, the evidence showed that the phone lines had been consistently recorded throughout the time period we reviewed from 2018 through August 2020 when the USPP retired the analog recorder. The evidence suggested that the USPP’s briefing statement was based on an apparent miscommunication between USPP personnel and the contractor who serviced the recorder in June 2020. USPP officials stated the contractor who had serviced the recorder in June 2020 told them that the phone lines had not been recorded. The contractor told us, however, that the contractor did not recall making that determination and that it was believed that the phone lines had likely been recorded.

b. The USPP Failed To Monitor or Maintain Its Analog Recorder

We determined that the USPP failed to monitor or maintain its analog recorder. Several factors contributed to that failure, including the lack of any USPP policy or practice requiring anyone to check or maintain it, a lack of available personnel in relevant units, and the absence of prior requests for recordings from the admin channel. As a result, the USPP did not identify for almost 2 years that it was not recording radio communications on its admin and special events channels.

DOI policy 446 *DM* 16 requires the USPP to have equipment in place that can record all the USPP's radio transmissions and dispatch center phone calls and to establish and implement procedures to meet that requirement. We found, however, that the USPP had not established any such procedures or policies regarding monitoring or maintaining the dispatch center's equipment.¹⁷ Accordingly, we found no one at the USPP had responsibility for maintaining the analog recorder or checking whether it was recording radio and phone communications as required. Dispatch center personnel, who report to a different chain of command than IT staff, stated they believed it was the IT division's responsibility to maintain IT equipment like the recorder. An IT manager disagreed, telling us that this issue was a "constant battle" and, according to the IT manager, dispatch center staff should monitor and maintain the equipment they used. USPP command officials gave us differing views on whether it was the dispatch center's or IT's responsibility. In addition, the USPP Chief told us she believed it was unclear who was responsible for the dispatch center's equipment. The end result, however, was that no one regularly monitored the equipment in question.

This lack of clarity regarding who was responsible for maintaining and monitoring the analog recorder was exacerbated by a lack of available personnel in both the IT division and dispatch center, which limited each group's ability to conduct regular equipment maintenance. The USPP previously had two radio employees in the IT division that maintained the USPP's radio equipment, including the recorder, but one left in mid-2018 and the other left in early 2019. The positions remained vacant until the USPP hired a radio manager in early 2022.¹⁸ However, the evidence suggests that even with those positions filled, the USPP did not regularly check whether the analog recorder was recording all USPP radio channels because the log information we reviewed showed that the admin and special events channels were not properly recorded since 2018. Further, the USPP did not have a maintenance agreement with any outside service providers for the analog recorder that could potentially have identified the recording issues in a timely manner.

We corroborated the conclusion in the USPP's July 2020 internal briefing document that dispatch center staff had not identified the recording problems until June 2020 because they had not

¹⁷ In our February 25, 2022 management advisory, *Safety Concerns and Other Deficiencies at the U.S. Park Police's Dispatch Operations Center in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area*, we recommended that the USPP establish and implement any necessary written procedures required by 446 *DM* 16.

¹⁸ As stated above, the USPP also had a radio contractor who assisted with the USPP's switch to a digital radio system, but the contract limited the contractor's ability to work on the radio recorder and ultimately expired in late 2019. In February 2020, the USPP contracted through the NPS for a radio technician to support the USPP with maintaining officer radios and reception infrastructure, but that contractor also did not generally assist with the recorder. The NPS informed the USPP that it would cease providing that limited additional support after March 2022.

previously received a request for a recording on the admin channel¹⁹; in emails we reviewed from 2018 to 2020, we found no prior requests for recordings from that channel.²⁰ Instead, we found the requests were for recordings on the USPP's dispatch channel, which dispatch center staff could consistently provide as requested.²¹

To address the deficiencies identified above, we recommend that the USPP implement written procedures defining the roles and responsibilities for the maintenance and monitoring of dispatch center IT equipment.

c. We Did Not Find Evidence That the USPP Intentionally Failed To Record Its Radio Communications on June 1, 2020

We did not find evidence that the USPP intentionally failed to record its radio communications during the security operation in Lafayette Park on June 1, 2020. As discussed above, the USPP used its admin radio channel to communicate that day. However, the analog recorder logs we reviewed showed that the analog recorder had likely stopped recording the admin channel in October 2018 and that the USPP did not discover this failure until it received requests for recordings from the Lafayette Park operation in June 2020.

We also did not find evidence suggesting that the USPP deliberately used the admin radio channel to communicate on June 1 because anyone had actual knowledge the channel was not recording. In fact, as discussed above, we did not find evidence that USPP personnel knew that certain channels, including the admin channel, were not recording at the time. Moreover, the USPP routinely used its secondary radio channels, like the admin channel, to communicate during demonstrations or other events to avoid disrupting regular patrol communications on the primary dispatch channel.

Emails we reviewed from that time also showed that command officials involved in the operation at Lafayette Park and the dispatch personnel who sought to retrieve the recordings were concerned when they learned that they were not available. For example, in a June 2020 email from the USPP incident commander at Lafayette Park to dispatch personnel and other command staff, the incident commander who had requested the recordings stated, "To not have the events over the past week recorded will go down as one of the biggest critical failures possible. Using that information for evidence and after action review is critical."

¹⁹ As discussed above, the admin channel was the channel used during the operation at Lafayette Park in June 2020 for which the USPP subsequently sought to retrieve the recordings.

²⁰ Requests for recordings are typically made via email or orally to dispatch center personnel.

²¹ As noted above, the USPP uses its dispatch channel to conduct its daily patrol activities, which more often involve incidents leading to criminal prosecutions and the need for recordings from the incident. In contrast, the USPP uses its secondary radio channels, like the admin and special events channels, in more limited circumstances.

d. The USPP Is Not in Compliance With the NPS' Records Retention Policy for Communications Stored on Its Old Analog Recorder

As discussed above, we determined that the USPP's analog recorder had been corrupted and that the USPP could not access any recordings on the system. As a result, we found the USPP is not in compliance with the NPS' records retention policy, which generally requires the USPP to preserve recordings for a minimum of 3 years.²² This failure to preserve recordings has had practical consequences. For example, we identified multiple requests in connection with criminal investigations for dispatch radio channel and telephone recordings from 2019 and 2020 that were likely stored on the analog recorder and that the USPP could not fulfill.²³

2. The USPP's Temporary Recording Solution Was Ineffective and Did Not Comply With DOI Policy

From August 5, 2020, when the USPP took its analog recorder out of service, until late October 2020, when the USPP installed its new digital recorder (see Figure 1), the USPP relied on an ineffective temporary recording solution that did not comply with 446 DM 16.

After learning the analog recorder could not make recordings, the USPP implemented a temporary solution that involved using battery-operated, portable digital recorders placed next to USPP radios to record communications. The USPP placed a USPP radio tuned to the dispatch channel on one side of a conference room and another USPP radio tuned to the admin channel on the other side of the conference room. The USPP then placed a battery-operated, portable digital recorder beside each radio to record the communications occurring on each channel. The USPP did not set up a similar system to record ongoing communications on the special events radio channel.²⁴ The dispatch center manager told us that, at the time, he believed the USPP would use the temporary recording solution for only a few days, and he said he had informed his chain of command of the limitations of this solution.

We reviewed all 119 recordings made with the portable recorders and records the USPP used to track use of the devices. We determined that, as used, the devices were ineffective. The devices frequently turned off on their own or ran out of battery power and stopped recording. Although the USPP constantly uses its radio system to communicate, we identified many dates for which the USPP has no recordings. We further found that almost one-third of the recordings were under 20 seconds in length and contained no audible radio transmissions.

Additionally, the USPP did not have a consistent or accurate computer filing system to save the recordings that were made. For example, the USPP saved almost one-third of the recordings in folders without any date or record of what channel the recording was from and others in folders labeled only with the date the recording was downloaded from the device rather than the date of the recording. In addition, the USPP had not set the date and time on the recorders, so the digital

²² NPS Records Schedule, N1-79-08-2, Protection and Safety, Item 2 (Feb. 2010). Depending on the nature of the incident, the policy requires longer retention periods from 7 to 25 years or for permanent retention.

²³ As of October 2021, USPP officers and DOJ personnel we contacted stated they did not know of any criminal cases that had been affected by the USPP's inability to provide relevant recordings. The USPP does have limited backup tapes of some of the recordings, but the most recent tape is from July 2018, and the USPP currently does not have a machine that can play the tapes.

²⁴ The USPP's current digital recorder began to record the USPP's phone lines on August 5, 2020, several months before the recorder started capturing the USPP's radio channels.

information stored with each file did not provide an accurate date and time of when the recordings were made.

Similarly, we found that the USPP used an ineffective system to check that the portable recorders were working as intended. A USPP official, whose duties included overseeing the dispatch center, created an online form in July 2020 to track recordings. The official instructed dispatch supervisors to complete the online form twice each shift to keep track of whether the USPP's old analog recorder was working and, if not, whether the portable recorders were recording instead. Our review of the online form showed that dispatch supervisors completed the form inaccurately or did not complete it at all. For example, one supervisor reported on the form that the analog recorder was working days after it had been taken out of service. In September 2020, when the USPP was using only the portable recording devices, the online form showed a supervisor had reported the devices were recording for the dispatch channel on only 9 out of 30 days.

As a result of these issues, the USPP cannot locate recordings of USPP radio communications from between August and October 2020 (see Figure 2). Our review of USPP emails confirmed several instances in which officers sought radio recordings in connection with criminal prosecutions that occurred while this temporary recording solution was in place and, in each instance, dispatch center personnel could not provide the recordings. The dispatch center manager told us he did not know of any instance in which the USPP successfully fulfilled a request for recordings made while using the portable recording devices. Given these shortcomings, we concluded that the USPP did not comply with 446 DM 16 while using the portable recording devices to record its radio communications.

3. The USPP Took Over 2 Years To Install Its Digital Recorder

We found that insufficient planning, delays in obtaining necessary security approvals, and installation challenges resulted in the USPP relying on its outdated analog recorder for at least 2 years longer than it had planned.

In September 2016, the USPP purchased nearly \$2 million of radio equipment for a digital radio system but did not purchase a digital recorder to replace its outdated analog recorder until September 2018 (see Figure 1). One NPS radio employee, who served as a contract representative for the USPP's transition to the digital radio system, stated that he believed the USPP did not include the recorder initially because the USPP was focused on the main components of the radio system infrastructure and was unsure whether it had sufficient funding to purchase the digital recorder.

After the NPS purchased the digital recorder in September 2018, USPP and NPS emails and contract documents demonstrate that USPP and NPS officials thought the installation process would take 5 weeks, but, in fact, the USPP and NPS had not confirmed the requirements to complete the installation. For example, the USPP, the NPS, and the installation company did not determine until March 2019 that the installation would require the DOI's network to connect to the DOJ's network, which hosts the USPP's radio infrastructure. Because of that connection, Federal guidance as well as the DOI's own policy required the DOI and the DOJ to enter into an agreement, known as an Interconnection Security Agreement, to establish agreed-upon technical

and security requirements.²⁵ The Chief of the Cybersecurity Risk Management Branch within the DOI's OCIO told us that this security agreement had to be completed before the two systems could connect. Further, the radio employee and contractor responsible for obtaining the new recorder for the USPP had left by early 2019 and had not been replaced.

It took nearly 1 year for the DOI and the DOJ to enter into the security agreement, in large part because a review by the OCIO's Privacy Branch extended the process from June to December 2019.²⁶ The DOI and the DOJ signed the security agreement in February 2020. USPP personnel involved in this process told us they had informed their chain of command about the delay but stated that USPP command officials did not engage with the OCIO to expedite the process.

After signing the security agreement in February 2020, it took the USPP an additional 6 months—from March to October 2020—to make the digital recorder functional due to technical challenges with the installation.²⁷ Emails we reviewed and USPP and NPS staff involved in the installation stated that it was a challenging process that involved coordination between personnel from several Government agencies and components (including the USPP, the NPS, and the DOJ) and private companies (including the service provider for the USPP's phone system, the service provider for the DOJ's radio system, the digital recorder manufacturer, and USPP and DOJ contractors).

Although the information we reviewed showed that installing the recorder presented technical challenges, the evidence also appeared to show that insufficient planning further delayed the process. For example, while the USPP had purchased the digital recorder in September 2018 and the security agreement was signed in February 2020, the NPS and USPP did not arrange for delivery of the digital recorder until the end of April 2020. Similarly, the parties had discussed the potential need to install a network security system with the digital recorder as early as December 2018, but the NPS and the USPP did not purchase that system until the end of June 2020. Together, these issues resulted in 10 modifications to the digital recorder contract and prolonged installation of the digital recorder for more than 2 years until October 2020.²⁸

4. The USPP Has Been Regularly Recording Its Radio Communications Since Late October 2020, But Its Recording System Still Does Not Fully Comply With DOI Policy and Faces Ongoing Challenges

We found that the USPP believed its digital recorder was functioning in early October 2020, but the logs and recordings we reviewed showed it did not, in fact, begin regularly recording until October 23, 2020. As a result, the USPP did not record its radio communications for approximately 2 weeks in October, and we found that the dispatch center could not fulfill the

²⁵ See Office of Management and Budget Circular A-130, Appendix I-6, *Responsibilities for Protecting and Managing Federal Information Resources* (2016) (requiring Federal agencies to “[o]btain approval from the authorizing official for connections from the information system, as defined by its authorization boundary, to other information systems based on the risk to the agency’s operations and assets, individuals, other organizations, and the Nation”); DOI, Security Control Standard, *Security Assessment and Authorization*, CA-3 System Interconnections (Sept. 2016) (same).

²⁶ A DOI privacy official told us that reviews of agreements such as this regularly take up to 1 year to complete due to what the officer described as a lack of “adequate resources” in the Privacy Branch.

²⁷ Our review of the recordings on the digital recorder showed that it began to record the USPP’s phone lines in August 2020.

²⁸ The contract modifications were at no cost to the USPP except for the modification to purchase the required network security system.

multiple requests it received for recordings from that period. Since October 23, 2020, the digital recorder's files we reviewed showed—and dispatch personnel confirmed—that the digital recorder has been regularly recording all radio and phone communications in the dispatch center with some initial temporary technical issues that the USPP was able to resolve (see Figure 2).

We also found, however, that the USPP's digital recorder still does not fully comply with DOI policy and presents other ongoing challenges. Under 446 *DM* 16, the USPP's recorder must “provide for continuous recording and instantaneous playback of all public safety radio transmissions as well as all incoming public safety telephone calls.” As of March 2022, the USPP dispatchers cannot instantly play back radio or phone communications because the feature has not been installed. As stated in our recent management advisory on the USPP's dispatch center, instant playback may be important during emergency situations where a caller is disconnected or otherwise unable to repeat what was said.²⁹ In that advisory, we recommended the USPP take immediate steps to comply with 446 *DM* 16, including obtaining instant playback for dispatchers.

The USPP has also not resolved several other ongoing issues related to its digital recorder. First, the installation company told us the digital recorder can send automatic alerts to USPP staff if it stops recording or encounters other errors, but the USPP has not set up those alerts. As a result, emails we reviewed showed that USPP personnel must manually check whether the recorder is working. Therefore, we recommend that the USPP evaluate the digital recorder's available features and implement any that can assist in monitoring the system's functionality.

Second, the USPP personnel we interviewed did not know that the installation company set a 3-year retention period on the digital recorder, so that, after that time, the recorder would begin to write over that data with new data. Dispatch center personnel we interviewed believed the system would save the recordings indefinitely. While the 3-year retention setting is consistent with NPS records retention rules for routine incidents, it is not consistent with the rules for more serious incidents, and the recorder may automatically delete recordings that the NPS is required to retain for longer than 3 years. We therefore recommend the USPP review the recorder's retention settings in light of the NPS' retention schedules and make any necessary changes to the USPP's retention procedures.

Third, one USPP official told us that the digital recorder needs a federally required IT system approval known as an Authorization to Operate (ATO), but we found that as of March 2022, it did not have one.³⁰ The USPP and the DOI OCIO told us that the USPP has entered into a service contract through which the OCIO will review the USPP's systems and seek any needed IT approvals. In connection with that effort, we recommend the USPP confirm whether it has all required IT approvals for dispatch center IT equipment, and, if not, take all necessary steps to obtain them.

²⁹ See DOI OIG, *Management Advisory – Safety Concerns and Other Deficiencies at the U.S. Park Police's Dispatch Operations Center in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area*, No. OI-SI-21-0171-W (Feb. 25, 2022).

³⁰ Under the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Special Publication 800-37 (Rev. 2), *Risk Management Framework for Information Systems and Organizations*, an ATO is defined as “[t]he official management decision given by a senior Federal official or officials to authorize operation of an information system and to explicitly accept the risk to agency operations (including mission, functions, image, or reputation), agency assets, individuals, other organizations, and the Nation based on the implementation of an agreed-upon set of security and privacy controls.” Under Office of Management and Budget Circular A-130, Appendix I, section 4.d.2, all Federal agencies need an ATO “prior to operational status” of a system. An ATO is a separate requirement than the security agreements discussed earlier in this report. One witness stated that a lack of personnel in the USPP's IT division affected its ability to obtain ATOs.

Lastly, the 1-year warranty on the USPP's digital recorder ended in December 2021, and as of February 2022, the USPP has not arranged to obtain regular maintenance on its digital recorder. As discussed above, the USPP's failure to maintain its prior recorder led to significant and prolonged recording deficiencies. Regular maintenance appears critical to identifying and preventing these issues from recurring, such as an outage in February 2022 that impeded the USPP from recording radio communications for 2 weeks (see Figure 2). The dispatch manager told us, however, that the USPP does not have anyone on staff with expertise to maintain the recorder and that the USPP has not procured a maintenance agreement with an outside provider. We therefore recommend that the USPP evaluate and implement any maintenance needed for its digital recorder to ensure proper functionality and compliance with DOI policy.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the USPP:

1. Implement written procedures defining roles and responsibilities for the maintenance and monitoring of dispatch center IT equipment.
2. Evaluate the digital recorder's available features and implement any that can assist in monitoring the system's functionality.
3. Review the digital recorder's retention settings in light of the NPS' records retention schedules and make any necessary changes to the USPP's retention procedures.
4. Confirm whether dispatch center IT equipment has all required IT approvals, and, if not, take all necessary steps to obtain them.
5. Evaluate and implement any maintenance needed for the digital recorder to ensure proper functionality and compliance with DOI policy.

IV. NPS RESPONSE SUMMARY AND OIG REPLY

We provided the NPS a draft of this report for review and comment. The NPS concurred with all five recommendations and stated it will work to implement them. For recommendations 1, 2, and 3, the NPS provided an anticipated implementation date of December 2022 for the actions it said it will take; for recommendation 5, the anticipated implementation date is August 2022. For recommendation 4, however, the NPS stated it will not complete its actions until December 2023, more than 16 months from now. The full text of the NPS' response is included as Appendix 2.

We consider the actions planned by the NPS to be responsive to our recommendations. Based on the NPS' response, we consider the recommendations resolved but not implemented. With respect to recommendation 4, we will request the USPP notify us when it determines if any dispatch center IT equipment needs an ATO, when the USPP obtains the conditional and final ATOs for any dispatch center IT equipment requiring an ATO, and periodic updates on the progress toward obtaining any such ATOs. The recommendations will remain open until we determine the NPS has taken sufficient corrective actions to warrant closure. We will continue to monitor the NPS' planned corrective actions until they have been fully implemented.

Appendix 1: Timeline of Events

September 2016

The U.S. Park Police (USPP) purchases equipment and services to replace the analog radio system with a digital radio system; purchase does not include a digital recorder.

October 2016–Mid-2018

The USPP continues to use its analog radio system while installing the digital radio system.

March 2018 The USPP's analog recorder stops regularly recording the special events radio channel, which is not discovered until June 2020.

Mid-2018 One of two radio employees departs the USPP.

September 2018

The USPP's analog radio system fails, requiring the USPP to begin using its digital radio system, but the USPP continues to use its analog recorder to record radio and phone communications.

The USPP purchases, but does not install, a new digital recorder.

October 2018

The USPP plans to install the new digital recorder this month but does not do so.

The USPP's analog recorder stops recording its admin radio channel, which is not discovered until June 2020.

Early 2019

The USPP's last radio employee departs the USPP.

March 2019–February 2020

March 2019 The USPP begins to draft a security agreement for the digital recorder; during the process, the USPP seeks assistance from the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Department of the Interior's (DOI's) Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO).

June 2019 The OCIO's Privacy Branch begins a privacy review of the security agreement.

December 2019 The OCIO's Privacy Branch completes the privacy review of the security agreement.

February 2020 The DOI and U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) sign the security agreement regarding the digital recorder.

March 2020

The USPP begins installing the digital recorder, requiring coordination with the NPS, the DOJ, the service provider for the USPP's phone system, the service provider for the DOJ's radio system, the digital recorder manufacturer, and USPP and DOJ contractors.

Appendix 1: Timeline of Events

May 2020–October 2020	
May 29–June 3	Demonstrations occur in Washington, DC, in and around Lafayette Park, which include a USPP operation to clear the park on June 1.
June 6	A USPP official requests USPP dispatch center personnel to provide radio recordings from each day of the demonstrations (i.e., from May 29 to June 3).
June 10	Dispatch center personnel find that they have recordings for communications from the demonstrations on the USPP’s dispatch radio channel but not the admin channel.
June 16	A contractor informs the USPP that the admin and special events radio channels have not been recording and repairs the recorder so that it begins recording the admin channel.
August 5	The USPP retires its analog recorder and begins using a temporary recording solution for the dispatch and admin radio channels; the USPP installs the digital recorder to begin recording dispatch center phone calls.
October 7	The USPP announces internally that the digital recorder is now recording the USPP’s radio channels, but recording logs show it was not in fact properly recording at that time.
October 23	The USPP completes installation of the digital recorder and begins to regularly record its radio channels.
December 2021	
	Warranty on the USPP’s digital recorder expires.



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, NW

Washington, DC 20240

Memorandum

To: Inspector General

From: Director

Digitally signed by
CHARLES SAMS
Date: 2022.06.07
14:42:57 -04'00'

Re: Draft Special Review – Review of the U.S. Park Police’s Communications Recording System Case No. OI-SI-21-0171-W

The National Park Service (NPS) has reviewed the draft Office of Inspector General report entitled, Draft Special Review of the U.S. Park Police’s Communications Recording System Case No. OI-SI-21-0171-W. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the referenced report, we take these matters seriously and are working to ensure their resolution.

Below are the responses to the specific recommendations, including steps the NPS has taken or will be taking to address the concerns raised.

Recommendation 1: Implement written procedures defining roles and responsibilities for the maintenance and monitoring of dispatch center IT equipment.

NPS concurs with this recommendation. A working group has been established to address deficiencies identified within the Dispatch Operations Center (DOC). A Plan of Action and Milestones (POAM) document has been created to track the progress of each action. An action item listed in the POAM titled, “Establish and implement additional written procedures as required by 446 DM 16 and the corresponding “Law Enforcement Handbook”. This will include updating the current Guideline Manual for Dispatch Operations. Specific procedures, roles, and responsibilities will be included in the policy revision. The anticipated date for completion is December 2022.

Recommendation 2: Evaluate the digital recorder’s available features and implement any improvement that can assist in monitoring the system’s functionality.

NPS concurs with the recommendation. The current system used for recording in the DOC is the Eventide Recording System. This system is functioning as designed and has the following capabilities: audio recording of Force radio channels, recording of phone conversations, export of recordings, Nexlog alerts with history of associated messages, and Administrative/Manager system access and control. Required random testing/checks of the system are already implemented as standard operating procedure. In addition to the current system, the working group will evaluate the feasibility of installing a redundant recording capability. Procedures and protocols regarding the radio recording system will be included in the updated Guideline Manual for Dispatch Operations. The anticipated date for completion date is December 2022.

Recommendation 3: Review the digital recorder’s retention settings in light of the NPS’ records retention schedules and make any necessary changes to the USPP’s retention procedures.

NPS concurs with the recommendation. The working group established to evaluate the DOC operations will review all applicable policies related to record retention requirements. Retention settings of the recording system will be configured to meet or exceed the minimum retention timeframe required by policy. The Information Technology (IT) section will work with the commercial system vendor to ensure compliance. The anticipated date for completion is August 2022.

Recommendation 4: Confirm whether dispatch center IT equipment has all required IT approvals, and, if not, take all necessary steps to obtain them.

NPS concurs with the recommendation. The United States Park Police (USPP) operate under the IT requirements/regulations of the NPS and the Department of the Interior (DOI). There is a large effort within the DOI to ensure all systems that require review and approval receive an Authority to Operate (ATO). An evaluation of the USPP has identified two systems being operated that may require an ATO. The USPP are engaged with members of the DOI and NPS to facilitate completion of any required ATO. In the short term the USPP will obtain a “conditional” ATO until the complete process can be finalized. The goal for completion is December 2023.

Recommendation 5: Evaluate and implement any maintenance needed for the digital recorder to ensure proper functionality and compliance with DOI policy.

NPS concurs with the recommendation. The radio recording system is functioning as designed. The evaluation of the radio recording capabilities, maintenance requirements, and other functional aspects are currently being evaluated. The working group is also evaluating the feasibility of implementing a redundant recording system in addition to the primary system. The working group will ensure the recording system is compliant with the record retention requirements as well. The anticipated time for completion is August 2022.