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## Peoria Police Shooting Raises Concerns Over Lack of Radio Transparency

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A fatal officer-involved shooting that occurred in Peoria on Tuesday evening has sparked questions about transparency and communication after the incident went unreported for hours, and scanner audio offered no insight into the unfolding situation.

Peoria Police confirmed the deadly encounter involved a man identified as 41-year-old Brandon M. Lewis, who reportedly attacked officers with a wooden bat around 5 pm. One officer was struck, prompting another to deploy a taser while a second officer discharged a

firearm. Lewis died from a single gunshot wound, according to the Peoria County Coroner. Details about the injured officer's condition have not been disclosed.

What has left many puzzled is the lack of timely information. The public and media remained unaware of the incident for nearly five hours until the Peoria Police Department released a statement at 10:35 pm Tuesday. This delay occurred despite the fact that most police incidents typically involve real-time communication through radio transmissions.

Since June, however, Peoria Police have encrypted their radio traffic, preventing the public from monitoring real-time dispatches. Although WEEK 25News has been granted access to this encrypted channel, the news team reported that it appeared to have failed on Tuesday, leaving them in the dark alongside the community.

The scanner audio was reviewed from that evening and pulled from the Broadcastify archives. It captured related activity. At 5:23 pm, Advanced Medical Transport (AMT) was heard responding to a subject in custody struggling to breathe, followed by repeated calls for medical help at 5:25 pm. The Peoria Fire Department requested additional support at 5:29 pm for a similar breathing-related issue. The Illinois State Police later logged the event as a death investigation at 7:15 pm.

The Peoria Police Department's lack of radio communication during a high-profile and fatal incident has drawn renewed attention to the decision to restrict public access. While the Communications Act permits the public to monitor radio traffic for safety and informational purposes, encryption policies now limit what can be heard by civilians and media outlets alike.

In January of last year, State Representative La Shawn Ford (Democrat, Chicago) introduced HB4339, a bill intended to mandate real-time access to law enforcement communications for broadcasters. However, the measure failed to progress and was ultimately dropped after a year.

"When you delay the information out to the press, then it sort of puts the constituents and the people in municipalities at risk because they actually may not find out until it's too late that a crime is taking place," Rep. Ford stated.

Peoria is not alone in adopting encrypted channels. Other departments in Illinois, including those in McLean County and Rockford, have taken similar steps, citing operational security.

Still, critics argue that this level of secrecy undermines public trust and limits accountability.

25News made efforts to speak directly with city officials about the matter. Police Chief Eric Echevarria, State's Attorney Jodi Hoos, and Mayor Rita Ali all declined on-camera interviews. Repeated attempts to contact the Advisory Committee on Police-Community Relations members went unanswered by Wednesday night.

According to state and county records, Lewis had a criminal history spanning two decades, including seven ordinance violations, two misdemeanors, and three felonies. His 2007 conviction involved sexual abuse of a minor, followed by a failure to register as a sex offender, and, most recently, a felony in 2023 for failing to report.

The Peoria Police Department has stated that the Illinois State Police will oversee the investigation into the incident. At present, key questions remain unanswered, not only about the fatal encounter itself but also about how the city's current communication policies may impact public safety and transparency in the future.