EMOTIONAL RESCUE

9-1-1 calls and emergency dispatchers are often in stressful situations given their central role in emergency response. Exposure to traumatic incidents can overwhelm an individual’s ability to cope, but thankfully, post-incident debriefings are becoming more commonplace.

“It’s important for us to help the helper.”
- Dr. Toby Snelgrove, Clinical Psychologist

E-Comm has incorporated the basic principles of Critical Incident stress interventions into the workplace, and has added another component—the Peer Support Team. E-Comm’s peer support personnel are trained in basic crisis intervention techniques, which focus to support any staff member affected by what they experience while listening to distressed callers to 9-1-1. Peer Support is a “grass-roots” motivated initiative, overseen by clinical supervisor Dr. Toby Snelgrove, an expert in the field of traumatic stress.

“There are times when emergency operators involved in overwhelming incidents need some ‘emotional first-aid,’” says Snelgrove. “It is important to recognize very difficult calls and to remain on the line.

The team also provides pre-incident stress education for new employees, to enable them to better understand and handle stressful events generated by the nature of the work that they do.

9-1-1 Service for Deaf – Tops in Canada

Since its inception nearly three years ago, E-Comm has become a Canadian leader in answering 9-1-1 calls for members of the deaf community who use Telephone Typewriters (TTY). TTYs allow deaf callers to communicate with 9-1-1 operators through electronic messaging.

Before E-Comm, emergency communication centres were responsible for independently handling TTY calls, and not all centres were equipped for this. E-Comm worked with the deaf community to determine where improvements were needed, and soon discovered this segment of society had a list of issues, problems and concerns surrounding 9-1-1 and the associated response of police, fire and ambulance agencies.

A standing TTY User Committee was established approximately two years ago and includes members of both the deaf community and emergency services.

Improvements

- More TTY units are now available (up from two to nine) to respond to incoming TTY calls. E-Comm now acts as “translators” to the agency the caller requires.
- All calls from a TTY are now captured on a voice logging system and can be retrieved if necessary.
- A recorded announcement has been developed advising a callers through the TTY that they have reached 9-1-1 and to remain on the line.

The committee is currently working on creating training materials for the 9-1-1 operators, as well as organizing a May 3rd, 2002 Town Hall meeting for members of the deaf community. The focus of the Town Hall meeting is 9-1-1 and the service it provides, and will include presentations from emergency services personnel. For more information on the town hall meetings visit www.gvad.com

Emotional Rescue

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E-Comm Completes First Phase of Radio Network

An E-Comm milestone was reached in April when “Phase One” of the Wide-Area Radio System was completed. Coverage now extends throughout the GVRD. When phases two and three are finished, projected for 2004 or earlier, the final coverage footprint will extend more than 33,000 square kilometres (from Whistler to Boston Bar) of British Columbia.

The last of the “original 18” municipalities that signed up for the E-Comm radio system came onboard following the successful transition of RCMP detachments in Surrey (the largest in the GVRD), White Rock and Langley in March and April.

In May, the New Westminster Police Service, the first municipality outside of the “original 18,” joins the system and for New Westminster Police Chief Lorne Zapotichny, the timing could not be better.

The New Westminster Police Service is currently using a 30-year-old analog radio system that has gone through many upgrades but still does not provide the reliable communication police need. A number of dead spots in coverage have been identified throughout New Westminster but with the E-Comm radio system, those coverage holes will be eliminated.

“Our radios are so old and antiquated that you cannot even find parts for them anymore. It’s been a real band-aid solution for us,” says Chief Zapotichny. “And there have been a couple of instances when officer safety was severely compromised. That’s the straw that finally broke the camel’s back.

In one instance, a police constable who pulled over a person with a long history of dangerous criminal activity could not hear the dispatcher who was detailing the criminal’s background over the radio. Fortunately, other police members on duty knew their colleague was not receiving the transmission as they were, and they rushed to the

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Radio Network… continued from cover

Radio Network

It’s been a busy six months for us all since I joined E-Comm and I owe a great deal of thanks to E-Comm’s staff for their enthusiastic welcome and for helping to familiarize me with the entire operation. There is much to report.

Calls to 9-1-1 continue to be on the rise with E-Comm call-takers responding to more than 1.26 million calls for service in 2001. We are exceeding our call-answer mandate and are now answering 98% of all calls within the first ring (that’s 3.6 seconds). Those outcomes are second to none in North America.

It has been a very exciting time for E-Comm’s Wide Area Radio System as Phase One of the project was completed. Radio coverage now extends throughout the GVRD. The British Columbia Ambulance Service (BCAS) became the first emergency service to use the radio system throughout the GVRD as we transitioned the BCAS “south of the Fraser river.” With that transition Richmond has now become the third city in B.C. to link all of its emergency services (the RCMP, Richmond Fire-Rescue Services and BCAS) to the E-Comm radio system. At present the other cities with this communications capacity are Vancouver and Port Moody.

We are also pleased to welcome RCMP detachments in Surrey, White Rock, and the North West. New Westminster has joined the North East.

PRIME-BC

Richmond RCMP went “live” on PRIME-BC (a new police records management system being implemented by E-Comm) in December. Richmond’s successful transition concludes Phase I of PRIME-BC.

“The new system makes it faster and easier for police to receive the information they need to fight crime by changing the way police handle information in the field,” says E-Comm’s public safety systems manager, Kathy Wunder. “Police vehicles are now outfitted with laptop computers so officers can access information stored in national police databases, such as the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) and the National Criminal Information Centre (NCIC),” adds Wunder.

Police also have access to information from international agencies, such as Interpol and to domestic agencies like the Information Centre (NCIC), adds Wunder.

For more information on PRIME-BC visit www.ecomm.bc.ca

Message from
Ken Shymanski, President

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