

Las Vegas Metro PD Covers their Bets for Y2K

By Dave Wilson

When it comes to public safety communications, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) is covering all their bets on New Year's Eve.

In the city that never sleeps, December 31, 1999, is set to be the busiest night in history. More than 750,000 people are expected to be reveling in the streets. Add a static population of about 1.5 million, and there is a potential for a record amount of calls to 9-1-1. Last year on New Year's Eve, the communications center processed more than 2,500 calls between 4 p.m. and 8 a.m. This year that number could double, not to mention any potential problems associated with Y2K.

"We can't anticipate what may happen on New Year's Eve," says Captain Marc Maston of LVMPD. "We cannot rely on the fact that there might not be a major problem, so we have prepared as if it is an eventuality, and we hope it doesn't occur."

In addition to a full compliment of police officers, fire and emergency personnel, video-equipped helicopters and an array of special details, LVMPD will deploy an Alternate Dispatch Center (ADC) in a remote location just in case the main communications center has a failure or has to be evacuated for any reason. The ADC will feature a network of laptop PCs running the new Windows 2000 operating system, Windows 2000 Advanced Server, Exchange 5.5, and a new CAD-like application that allows call-takers to track incidents and forward information to dispatchers.

"This system is like having a miniature CAD system on a laptop," says Sharon Counterman, LVMPD operations director and NENA 2nd vice president. "It gives us instant communication between call-taker and dispatcher, has the intuitive ability to match ALI information with our assigned channels and then creates a record that can eventually be put into our main system."

The new ADC uses a 32-foot trailer that can be towed to a designated secured site with pre-configured ringdown lines. It contains approximately 10 radio dispatch positions with laptop computers networked to eight telephone positions located in an adjacent structure. If the ADC is activated, 9-1-1 calls will be routed from the tandem via dedicated ringdown lines. Call-takers using Caller ID and laptops will enter critical information from callers to laptops running an incident-tracking application called Call-Details from Plant Equipment, Inc. (PEI). Call-Details allows call-takers to send all the information over the network to a dispatcher responsible for a specific section of the city. In addition, the incident record is stored in the Call-Details SQL Server 7 database, and can be later uploaded to LVMPD's main CAD.

According to Counterman, the manual alternative would be to have call-takers write down information on incident cards and then have runners deliver them to the appropriate dispatcher. The only record would be the paper trail of the incident card.

“This is a great improvement over a manual (card-based) system because it saves time, increases accuracy and creates a record,” says Counterman. “Best of all, it’s basically an off-the-shelf software that can be implemented in sync with our plan.”

The planning for New Year’s Eve for Y2K began more than two years ago and entailed a complete worst-case scenario analysis. Because the communications center is vital to emergency services and the primary lifeline for emergency personnel, establishing an ADC became a high priority.

“We had a scare a couple of years ago where toxic fumes from a nearby rail car came into the communications center’s ventilation system. We made it through without evacuating, but it was extremely difficult to work,” says Counterman. “Having an ADC gives us an extra layer of precaution for New Year’s Eve, and it will give us a very flexible solution whenever something like that occurs.”

In first discussing the options, the LVMPD team asked their Information Services group to look into developing an application that could serve as a CAD alternative. In a timely meeting last spring, Counterman and Captain Maston happened upon a viable option.

“We were reviewing 9-1-1 equipment from several vendors and we began talking to the representatives from Plant about the ADC,” says Counterman. “They looked at each other and said ‘we are in development of just such a solution.’ You could just see the light bulbs go on—everyone was very excited.”

LVMPD officials were looking at PEI’s VESTA 9-1-1 system for their new 32,000 square-foot communications center, set for deployment in spring 2000. In the process of working with PEI representatives, it became apparent that PEI’s new product, Call-Details, could be a win-win for both organizations.

“It was perfect timing for us, and for them as well,” says John K. Fuller, vice president of marketing for PEI. “We had this application in the final development phase and all of a sudden there was a great opportunity to put it to work. We are very pleased.”

Fuller noted that Call-Details is the first public safety application to use Microsoft’s new Windows 2000 and the new SQL Server 7 database.

In addition to serving as the back up New Year’s Eve, LVMPD will be able to deploy the ADC when and anywhere needed. In addition, it can serve as a portable training center for call-takers and dispatchers. The Call-Details application will also be installed at workstations in the new communications center to provide a permanent backup to the CAD.

“The flexibility of having a backup for our CAD and having a network of laptops will give us a great range of options,” said Maston. “We are looking forward to having everything in place and on-line sometime early next year. Once we cut over, I think we will have one of the most optimal 9-1-1 centers in the nation.”

For information on LVMPD’s ADC or the new communications center project, contact Sharon Counterman at (702) 229-3417. For information on Call-Details, contact Plant Equipment, Inc. at (909) 676-4802.

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