

PSAP Clutter Awareness

By Sergeant Randall Larsen

Desktop real estate and workspace environment are precious commodities for telecommunicators. Webster's Dictionary describes clutter as "a crowded or confused mass impeding movement or reducing effectiveness."

When it comes to PSAP clutter, equipment upgrades are often accompanied by the addition, not the elimination, of equipment into the dispatch workspace—don't forget about operator manuals and notes. For reasons of accessibility, it is not unusual for handwritten notes, speed dial, and Rolodex lists to be pinned to taped to various surfaces of the workspace. As such, it doesn't take long before every inch of a telecommunicator's workspace is crowded with equipment and paper.

In consolidating your equipment and sources of information, the intent is always to maximize desktop real estate and reduce clutter from your workspace environment in order to maintain an efficient 9-1-1 dispatch process.

Is Clutter Really a Problem?

Colonel Ernest E. Ricci comments in his article "Minimizing Stress and Promoting Comm Center Employee Satisfaction" that, "The design, quality and condition of the workspace within which 9-1-1 telecommunicators must function is directly related to the quality of performance which will be produced in that environment." (February 1996, APCO Bulletin.)

It is difficult for telecommunicators or dispatchers to perform their duties efficiently if they are continually dealing with confined workspaces. On a regular shift, telecommunicators and dispatchers operate at least three pieces of commonly used equipment (for example, a 9-1-1 system, Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD), records management system, state law enforcement communications system, radio dispatch equipment, call recording equipment, and a map display system). Workstations comprised of five monitors, three key boards, two headsets, TTY and dispatch equipment are common.

The Integrated Workstation (IWS)

Using an Integrated Workstation (IWS) is a great way to organize telecommunicator and dispatcher workspace. The reduction of PSAP clutter is a definite advantage of going with an IWS, since it integrates individual pieces of equipment. Consolidation and the integration of individual elements such as 9-1-1 and administrative telephone lines, ALI/ANI display, selective transfer capabilities, Instant Recall Recording (IRR), teletype, radio and CAD into personal computer functions is possible through the IWS. By combining the power of the computer and communications together, the IWS unites technology between the caller and telecommunicator.

The IWS workstation you choose must meet the capabilities and needs of your 9-1-1 system. The introduction of the SeNTinel workstation into the Fife Police Department allowed them to

merge two separate telephone systems (one which was on a separate handset), the 9-1-1 ANI display and transfer buttons, the 9-1-1 ALI screen, and the TTY keyboard. Five separate pieces of equipment were consolidated into one PC for view on a single, twenty-one inch, touch screen monitor.

Paper and Workspace Clutter

There are few PSAP and dispatch centers that escape the posting of speed dial lists or handwritten instructions by staff on walls and workstation surfaces. For the most part, a telecommunicator accesses emergency information faster when it is written down and posted rather than spending time to find it on their 9-1-1 equipment. Rolodexes with response agency telephone numbers (such as wrecker companies or tow trucks), can be found in the workspace, accompanied by peripherals such as : emergency medical dispatch flip cards (11”x 18” in size), notes, repair and call trace forms, directions for language lines, and ANI/ALI discrepancy forms for reporting database errors.

Accessibility is the key. User-friendly software is one method of eliminating paper and workspace clutter. By using software to integrate documentation into the IWS, a telecommunicator takes advantage of the computer’s speed to access information rather than referring to a posted list. The introduction of the SeNTinel 9-1-1 software allows telecommunicators and dispatchers to access Rolodex numbers through a speed dial function.

The CML equipment also has built-in speed dial capability. The Fife Police Department has created many different phone lists for other police agencies, jails, towing companies, and courts. The sizes of these lists are virtually unlimited. As a result, we have customized the Fife Police Department’s lists with those numbers used on a regular basis. Once integrated, these phone numbers are available at the touch of a finger or a mouse button click . The end result for the Fife PD: the elimination of several pages of phone list.

Be Realistic, Plan Ahead

Your goal is to integrate all of your 9-1-1 equipment into a single workstation and eliminate clutter. Don’t be overwhelmed. If you are practical and plan ahead, the ‘clutterless’ PSAP will become your reality. The long-term philosophy is total operability on a single workstation using a platform with software that permits multitasking; Windows NT is a good example of such a platform .

As a general rule; allow yourself at least two years for planning and equipment integration. Ask yourself these questions:

- What the demands are on your PSAP (current and future)?
- What are the needs and training requirements of your staff?
- After cut-over, will you continue to upgrade your equipment?
- Making the workstations at each PSAP to work together is one of the most important steps in the entire process. Are you aware of the operational dynamics of your PSAP?

Conclusion

The addition of modern E9-1-1 technology into the Fife Police Department has put our PSAP staff in a position to efficiently meet the emergency needs of a growing population. In the future we may merge our CAD program with the CML equipment to eliminate another monitor from the desktop. By consolidating PSAP equipment, you not only facilitate and reduce telecommunicator training time, but you provide your staff with greater accessibility to common information such as speed dial lists and emergency agency numbers from a central source. The technology is available for all PSAPs, regardless of size, to eliminate PSAP clutter through the reduction and consolidation of their PSAP equipment.

Clutter in the workplace and on the desktop wastes valuable time, results in additional research, adds to the documentation process, and increases financial considerations. When it comes to PSAP clutter, take the following to heart: less is more. Less equipment, concise and focused information, and installations. Keep everything as simple as possible.