

Same Service, Same Goals - Different Number:

Antwerp, Belgium Reaps the Rewards of 1-0-1 Emergency Response Equipment
By Paul T'Kindt

In the country of Belgium, the number 9-1-1 does not exist. Belgian citizens are required to dial separate emergency numbers for police, fire and ambulance service. As a large European economic center and the second largest port in Europe (fifth in the world), people in the Belgian City of Antwerp dial 1-0-1 when they need police assistance. As in North America, the Antwerp Police Communication Center counts on the hard work of its police force (1,800 strong), and on its equipment to provide 24-hour response to its 54 municipalities.

Time for a Change

To continue efficiently serving a residential population approaching one million people, management at the Antwerp Police Communication Center realized that an equipment upgrade was required to replace their out of date, 1980s technology.

The project mission was clear, and the objectives two-fold:

- the provision of a 24-hour, emergency communications solution
- the meeting of dispatcher needs concerning the provision of Automatic Number Identification and Automatic Location Identification (ANI and ALI), user-friendly call-taking equipment, and a Flemish Graphical User Interface (GUI)

Requirements

At the heart of the Center's 1-0-1 response equipment is the ECS-1000 controller, an intelligent communication system. As a selective router for Antwerp, the ECS-1000 receives and distributes 1-0-1 calls over a wide variety of incoming trunks. Not only does it receive calls and locate them, it even traces the call-back number if the caller is disconnected.

Freddy Buyl, Director and Manager for Industry with INES (a Belgium-based integrator of communications equipment), noted, "The Communication Center's up-to-date system assists dispatchers in providing faster assistance to people in emergency situations. The response time for calls, formerly twenty to thirty seconds, has been reduced to approximately ten seconds."

For the Antwerp Police Communication Center, the ECS-1000 serves as the ANI/ALI Controller and automatic call distribution system. Providing effective and flexible emergency response, and year 2000 compliance, the ECS-1000 is designed with numerous safeguards against equipment failure. It provides dedicated backup beyond the operational requirements of the main system

and in the unlikely event of a module failure, standby modules are designed to take over without affecting our system's operation.

Addressing Dispatcher Needs through Call-taking Software

Telephone Number and Location Information

The technology is now in place to provide the Center's call-takers with the ability to identify a caller's location. All three answering positions at the Antwerp Police Communication Center are equipped with a Flemish translation of CML's SeNTinel 9-1-1, 32-bit, Microsoft Windows NT[®] Integrated Workstation (IWS) software.

When a call arrives at the call-taker position, the telephone number and location of the caller automatically appear on the SeNTinel 9-1-1 dispatching screen. ANI makes it possible to read the caller's telephone number, ALI reveals the name and address of the caller. With the automatic provision of telephone number and location information, call-takers now focus on speaking with an emergency caller to obtain and document the details of their situation.

Integrated Recording and Equipment for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired

All operator positions at the Communication Center are equipped with Instant Recall Recorder (IRR), integrated, digital, voice recording and play-back software. IRR allows call-takers to monitor conversations, transfer emergency lines, place calls on hold, and provide convenient "point-and-click" search capability.

In order to provide comprehensive emergency 1-0-1 service to all citizens, including those citizens who are hearing impaired or deaf, integrated TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) functionality was included. When a TDD call arrives at the Communications Center, the equipment recognizes the tones generated by a TDD machine and a special TDD window (designed to facilitate the communication between a call-taker and the TDD caller) is automatically activated.

Transfer Capability

Through the system, operators have the ability to easily transfer, connect or conference emergency calls to other agencies and vice versa. For instance, callers are automatically transferred to other agencies such as ambulance and fire (100), the jail, and other police if required.

Increased Management through Statistics

The Communications Center recognized the benefit of having two sets of statistical management software to track the Center's performance. CallReporter serves as a valuable tool in permitting the Communication Center's managers to collect, display, generate, and analyze predefined, easy-to-read, real-time statistical reports. Through the SMART (System Maintenance, Administration Reconfiguration Terminal), the capability exists for the Center's supervisors to

have real-time information on all operator, trunk and component activity, as well as specified historical, statistical information on operator performance and module functionality.

Conclusion

Antwerp, the largest city of Flanders, has experienced steady economic growth in the twentieth century. In 1993, Antwerp was nominated Cultural Capital of Europe. This gave rise to a new cultural high point and international prestige. The Antwerp Police Communication Center follows in that vein by providing the City of Antwerp with superior 1-0-1 service. This landmark, emergency communication facility provides world-class emergency response to citizens in distress.

The INES/CML 1-0-1 system in Antwerp has been running since the end of November 1998; it is the first Emergency Communication system of its kind in Belgium.

In 1998, the Antwerp Police Communication Center responded to approximately 250,000 calls. Serving an excess of 800,000 residents, the safeguards are now in place to ensure the provision of 24-hour service, and faster response time. In modernizing its existing response center and equipment, the Center now absorbs 120,000 additional calls per year, and deals with mobile callers.

As a precursor to further improving 1-0-1 service to its citizens, the Belgium government is making provisions to integrate all police service under 'ASTRID'. Planned for activation in the year 2001, ASTRID will unite all of the police units throughout Antwerp and create a single provincial communication center for 1-0-1 call-taking and dispatch.

Paul T'Kindt, on the Antwerp Police Force since 1976, has been a Radio Officer with the Antwerp Police Communication Center since 1995. When it comes to ensuring the success of monitoring and maintaining the Emergency center, 1-0-1 central, dispatch, and the police infrastructure, Mr. T'Kindt credits the support of the team at the Communication Center, and acknowledges his involvement on numerous police management and emergency service committees.