



Equipping A Consolidated Comm Center

The South Shore Regional Emergency Call Center in Hingham, MA, went live with Zetron's radio dispatch console and VoIP call-taking system. The successful center is now serving as a model for other communities considering consolidation.

There's no question that communities within a region can reap substantial benefits from combining their individual public-safety answering points (PSAPs) into a single, consolidated, regional center. Consolidation allows the participating communities to combine and share resources and to centralize their operations. This usually improves interoperability and information sharing among agencies that use the center. It can also result in significant cost savings over time.

It was with these considerations in mind that four towns in Massachusetts—Hingham, Hull, Norwell and Cohasset—recently decided to combine efforts and create a new regional communications center in Hingham. With the help of a team that included a newly created regional board; Zetron reseller, ALL-COMM Technologies; and public-safety consultant and solutions provider, iXP Corporation; a new consolidated center was planned, built and equipped. The new South Shore Regional Emergency Call Center (SSRECC) opened to great fanfare in October of 2011.

Thus far, the SSRECC has already improved the area's emergency and law-enforcement response times and services. It is has also become a model for other communities that are considering consolidation.

Foresight and funding

Al Wallace, manager of iXP Corporation's Northeast region, played a key role in the planning and implementation of the SSRECC and also serves as its temporary director. He says that foresight on the part of the Massachusetts legislature helped get the consolidation project rolling.

"A few years ago, those at the state level recognized the benefits that could come from consolidating Massachusetts' numerous, small PSAPs into larger, regional ones," he says. "So they passed legislation that allowed revenues to be collected and dedicated to that purpose. The SSRECC is the first center to be created and awarded funds under this program."

Choosing the equipment and vendor

Once funding for the SSRECC had been secured, planning got underway. Wallace helped establish requirements such as the number of channels, phone lines, and dispatch positions it would need. He also helped select the center's new communications equipment and the vendor who would implement and support it.

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- Al Wallace, iXP

“We reviewed a number of vendors on the state’s contract list,” Wallace says. “From that, we created a short list of finalists and evaluated their training, response times, and reputation for service and support. Support was a key consideration because, even if you have the best system in the world, if you don’t have good support when you need it, you’re not going to be happy.”

“As far as the communications equipment is concerned,” he continues, “we wanted updated, reliable functionality and the ability to integrate multiple resources into a single console. Based on all of these criteria, Zetron reseller ALL-COMM Technologies was awarded the project with a proposal based on Zetron radio dispatch and telephony equipment. We felt that their solution offered the best combination of reliable equipment and solid, reputable support.”

ALL-COMM’s solution for the SSRECC included:

- Zetron’s Series 4000 Communication Control dispatch system
- Eight positions of Zetron’s Integrator RD dispatch console
- Zetron’s Series 3300 VoIP Call-Taking System
- Eleven Zetron Intelligent Radio Interface Modules (iRIMs) to connect the console to 22 Kenwood radios

“The Zetron dispatch system provides interoperability between the four towns’ different radio equipment,” explains Paul Boudreau, president of ALL-COMM Technologies. “The system’s flexibility also allows for expansion over time as more communities come into the SSRECC. The Series 3300 phone system is used for the non-emergency 9-1-1 calls that an emergency often triggers. This is important because for every 9-1-1 call you take, you might have to summon any number of additional secondary services to the scene.”

‘Walls, bricks and mortar’

The second floor of the Hingham Town Hall School Department building was chosen to be the SSRECC’s new home. Before the equipment could be installed, the area had to be entirely renovated in a process Wallace calls a “gut rehab.”

“This phase was all about walls, bricks and mortar,” he says. “Then we installed a generator and battery backup and entirely new dispatch console furniture.”

It wasn’t until all of the construction, renovation and remodeling had been completed that ALL-COMM could step in and coordinate the equipment installation, testing and finalization. According to Wallace, this went “...very smoothly.”

Boudreau concurs and explains some of the benefits they encountered as they set up the new radio equipment: “We were able to program radios with multiple frequencies,” he says. “This gives the radios multi-channel control. This is a very efficient way of doing things and is much less expensive than having to dedicate an individual radio to each channel resource.”

Training and transition

The next stage involved training and then transitioning each of the four towns into the center, one at a time, at a rate of about one town every six to eight weeks.

Hingham was the first to move, so they were the first to be trained. ALL-COMM provided the technical training. It was particularly effective because, with ALL-COMM’s knowledge of the equipment, the site, and the region, they were able to tailor the training to the project’s unique requirements.

Training for the dispatchers was provided by iXP Corporation. This included training on the new equipment as well as introducing dispatchers to the new procedures and resources that would apply to the SSRECC.

Once Hingham’s training was completed, their dispatchers moved into the facility, and it went live. About six weeks later, dispatchers for the town of Hull moved in. The processes of moving Norwell and Cohasset into the SSRECC are expected to be completed by the end of March.

A model center

The SSRECC is already delivering the benefits that Boudreau and Wallace were hoping for. “With the Zetron equipment, we were able to put multiple communities’ radio resources on each screen,” says Boudreau. “This is important because

if a SSRECC dispatcher assigned to one community gets too busy, another dispatcher can pitch in to cover it. The flexibility of the channel allocations and resources is tremendous.”

“The key for us was being able to match the quality and reliability of the Zetron product with ALL-COMM’s excellent service and support,” says Wallace. “Based on what we’re getting at the SSRECC and what we’ve gotten at previous deployments, we’d definitely use Zetron again.”

Additional proof of the project’s success is the fact that two more towns are considering moving to the SSRECC in the near future.