

**Temporary Solution for the Pandemic Becomes a Full Functioning 9-1-1 Backup Center**

**OVERVIEW:** Creating an alternate site for 9-1-1 and Radio for continuity of operations during COVID-19 pandemic and solving the long term need for a backup location.

**CHALLENGE:** Monterey County Emergency Communications Department (ECD) operates a countywide, consolidated emergency communications center providing 9-1-1 and non-emergency call answering and dispatch services for law enforcement, fire protection and emergency medical services for over 30 public safety agencies across the County and prior to the pandemic did not have a “back-up” 9-1-1 Center. This is a common situation in 9-1-1 centers, often due to cost, low frequency of use and technology/licensing constraints. When COVID-19 pandemic hit, we became very concerned about 9-1-1 centers being shut down due to contamination and then later in the pandemic we became aware that additional social distancing would support the ongoing operation for both our Dispatch staff and American Medical Response (AMR) Dispatchers that rent three of our consoles to provide ambulance dispatch services for the County.

**SOLUTION:** Monterey County ECD was very familiar with large scale golf events such as the Pebble Beach ProAm and US Open and had developed the ability to set up a remote dispatch center that had Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD), radio (via mobile radio) and remote call handling through a Virtual Private Network (VPN) back to the primary center. This approach was always thought as a temporary use. With our experience of golf events, we used our temporary use idea, to create a backup location to be used if our center required cleaning due to contamination. The ECD was able to leverage remaining budget to purchase computers for CAD workstations, radio applications and utilized existing call handling laptops to set up a functional back up location within two months of the initial Pandemic in the Information Technology Department (ITD) conference room. We selected this location due to the proximity to technical expertise and support of the IT staff. We quickly realized that social distancing was a key issue that we didn’t address when stood up our backup location. This conference room was heavily used for Zoom meetings and the workstations set up were in close quarters. This had never been a consideration

for special events. We had always had complete access to the locations with no competing use. Once we realized that the concept to take the special events idea and make it larger worked, we began to search for a suitable location that would give the ECD the ability to have social distance and a private location. Staff identified many conference rooms at the County Government Center would not be used for the duration of the pandemic and ultimately coordinated the use of a conference room for a minimum of 2 years. This ability to move to the Government Center allowed the location to be secure and have the requisite IT connections. In December of 2020, this new center went live when the ECD moved the AMR staff over to this remote location.

**INNOVATION:** When creating a backup center, most 9-1-1 agencies are stymied due to budget and the idea that it must be “just like the primary center”. Innovation is simplicity. Create what can be accomplished in small bites and keep adding. When the ECD started this project, we had to coordinate the technical knowledges of our 9-1-1 system administration, radio technicians and IT network engineers. There was no “how-to” manual to create a back up center. Using the experiences of special events gave us the confidence to building this on a larger scale. In the first fiscal year we purchased computers and utilized the radio applications over IP along with our phone solution. The second fiscal year we were able to purchase limited radio consoles to enhance our capability as well as purchase additional phone workstations and servers to allow for redundant communication.

**RESULTS:** As we move into the current fiscal year we have worked to strengthen our VPN connections to have additional redundancy and we have volunteered to be a regional backup center for the State and this has allowed us to secure additional next generation 9-1-1 network at no cost to the ECD.

**REPLICABILITY:** This is a successful example of working together to accomplish a backup center. This shows that any County or City with a 9-1-1 center can create a backup center in phases. It doesn’t require a large budget. It requires knowledge of the system abilities.

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**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:** Pictures of the Center at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/vSUeGWLYDe47kkvC7>