

INTUITIVE CAD

IN VOLUSIA COUNTY

New System Supports Multiple Agencies

STORY & PHOTOS BY MARY ESTES



The digital clock on the EVAC Ambulance Web site counts the days, hours and seconds to Daytona's next high-profile event (e.g., Bike Week, the Daytona 500, the Pepsi 400). EVAC and the Volusia County (Fla.) Sheriff's Office Fire/EMS Emergency Communications Center (ECC) view the countdown as serious business. The clock symbolizes the importance of emergency readiness and illustrates the need for a CAD system that is intuitive and efficient enough to meet the needs of a locale with special emergency response requirements.

Consider the following: The ECC service area covers 1,207 square miles of Atlantic beaches, interstates and urban-to-rural geography. In one major event weekend, Daytona Beach's population can double with the influx of tourists (e.g., 500,000 Harley Davidson fans, 250,000 NASCAR followers and 100,000 spring breakers). EVAC transports more than 42,000 patients annually to seven area hospitals, with a large percentage of these transports occurring in high-profile-event months. Fire calls can be plentiful during tourist season, too, especially when droughts collide with tourist season and wildfires burn out of control, like during the summer of 1998. Routine calls and special events

keep 35-40 telecommunicators and the crews of 28 ambulances and nearly 200 fire apparatus on their toes. Without the proper dispatch tools, emergency response would be even more of a challenge.

PLANNING TOOLS RULE

"It comes down to good planning and the proper tools," says Mark O'Keefe, the community information officer for EVAC Ambulance. Upgrading the CAD system is one of the ECC's most recent progressive moves.

A text-based CAD had served the ECC well for the previous decade. However, after more than a decade of steady increases in call volume—approximately 18,000 calls in 1989 compared with almost 100,000 in 2006—an upgraded CAD was a natural step for the county's emergency preparation. Advancing to a more sophisticated CAD means that telecommunicators can streamline operations and interface more efficiently with other agencies and the county's 31 fire stations.

"Keeping up with the industry's latest technology is part of a good planning process, and the new CAD is a tool to accomplish [this]," says O'Keefe.

Debbie L. Smith, ENP, assistant commander for the Volusia County Sheriff's

Office Fire/EMS ECC, says every agency has specific needs, but if you're researching a new CAD system, you should consider whether it has an open systems architecture, a reliable/fail-safe design and built-in security that allows an administrator to define user levels. She also says the CAD system design should allow for software and data updates with minimal downtime and without interrupting the dispatching process.

The Volusia County Sheriff's Office Fire/EMS ECC selected companion software programs from EnRoute Emergency Systems, formerly known as Geac Public Safety, to accommodate the center's ambulance and fire/EMS needs. Each CAD program is accessible and simultaneously viewable on the same monitor. Both programs are populated with drop-down features unique to their particular agency's operational needs, including comprehensive documentation.

CALL HISTORY A MUST

Because the county's emergency calls can increase dramatically during a given season and tourist event, the ability to record, archive and retrieve prior call and unit history data is critical to help telecommunicators anticipate staffing needs and plan for maintenance scheduling and response



Fast Facts
Volusia County has:

- A land area of 1,207 square miles;
- 47 miles of beaches;
- A year-round population of 445,000; and
- A special-event population of approximately 1 million.

It's the home of:

- NASCAR headquarters;
- The Daytona International Speedway;
- The Daytona 500;
- Bike Week;
- Biketoberfest; and
- Ormond Beach.



requirements. The CAD system allows reporting of historical data by incident type, location and time of year.

“A comm center that combines ambulance and fire dispatch is an ideal environment for sister software programs that accommodate multi-agency disciplines,” says Molly Crews, vice president and general manager of EnRoute Emergency Systems. “The result is more seamless dispatch operations.” She notes that the fire, ambulance and even law enforcement functions can be viewed concurrently while providing access to agency-specific dispatch functions.

RIGHT TIME TO GO LIVE

To limit service interruption, the Volusia County Sheriff's Office Fire/EMS ECC decided to go live on the new CAD system in July 2006, immediately following the Pepsi 400 NASCAR race and well before Biketoberfest, according to Smith. “This gave us time to get up to speed on the CAD before our busy season,” she says.

Telecommunicators spent the slower time period getting acquainted with the graphical environment and acclimating to the optional mouse usage, which they can now use interchangeably with keyboard commands. With the click of the mouse, telecommunicators can navigate historical

data essential to perform real-time call demand analysis and improve overall operational efficiencies.

They also customized displays to match individual preferences and learned how to easily navigate the status bar, which provides a snapshot of the current system status and incorporates message alerts that give telecommunicators instant messages and memos from other CAD system users. (Note: Although telecommunicators are free to customize their screens, the EnRoute CAD system has an administrative override feature that ensures required information fields are always retained on the screen.) Telecommunicators find the color-coded system for status information and message alerts especially useful.

O'Keefe mentions a number of features that streamline dispatch ambulance operations: The timer and scheduler features help keep ambulances on task. “More information is brought to the telecommunicator, including the times [spent] on any event to warn if time is running out,” he says.

Drop-down menus and the ability to drag and drop data without typing in each entry also save time.

Like the ambulance CAD, the fire/EMS CAD facilitates quick response to incoming calls, rapid dispatch of required units

and complete documentation of incidents. The program supports multiple calltakers, dispatchers and active incidents. Each call may be dispatched by address (validated against a geographical database), telephone number, intersection, grid, x and y coordinates, business name, landmark, call box or alarm activation. The system may be scaled for one or many agencies. Multi-jurisdictional centers can be accommodated with individual response types, as well as restricted display and reporting by agency and/or area.

CONCLUSION

In Volusia County, whether a drought comes calling, spring breakers hit the beach or speed fans descend on Daytona International Speedway, the county's fire/EMS ECC is prepared. And the new CAD system helps telecommunicators make *efficient* emergency response their No. 1 priority. ||PSC||

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