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In The News

Salt Lake County Plans Separation from a 911 Dispatch Center

By Amy Choate-Nielsen

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The Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office took a step Tuesday toward separating its 911 emergency calls from the Valley Emergency Communications Center.

After a lengthy discussion, Salt Lake County Council members voted in favor of beginning the dissolution, as long as the Unified Fire Authority joins the sheriff's office in forming a separate public-safety answering point in the County's Emergency Operations Center.

Read more at <http://deseretnews.com:80/article/1,5143,695229985,00.html>

What Does This Mean For You?

Excellent and skilled contact between an emergency center and public safety departments is critical. Dividing PSAP operations is distressing. This disrupts your staff and office. Performance can suffer. There may be a way to improve current communications before it becomes a problem.

Bell Services West Will Help

Are your communication systems causing friction between departments? Is there a problem with efficiency? Is something making your people less effective? Before you consider separating communication centers, let Bell Services West's [E9-1-1 Performance Benchmark Service](#) give you a baseline to measure your current results. Our engineers also provide analysis and recommendations. Possibly, by making your current systems more effective, you may not need to experience the cost and "system shock" of separating communication efforts.

In less than a **week** and for as little as **\$500**, our [E9-1-1 Performance Benchmark Service](#) will provide you with a report card that will evaluate your PSAP needs and summarize trends.

Salt Lake County Plans Separation from a 911 Dispatch Center (continued)

Council members also voted to allow VECC time to resolve some of the communications problems that have developed between the center and the sheriff's office during the last seven years.



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"We are unhappy with the communication between us and VECC," Sheriff Jim Winder said. "Operationally, I don't think that's the most effective system, but I don't think it's because VECC is intentionally trying to be less effective."

Winder pointed out that there is a need for more 911 dispatch systems in the county.

Winder also said it would be better for the sheriff's office to receive unincorporated Salt Lake County 911 calls directly, instead of the current system, where county 911 calls first go to VECC, then to a call center in the county, then to a 911 dispatch center with the county.

Although one council member, David Wilde, voiced his disapproval over attempting to isolate the county's 911 calls from VECC, a majority of the council agreed that a change is needed. If plans to remove Salt Lake County from VECC go forward, the separation could be complete as early as June 2008.

"We just have to do whatever we have to do," Council Chairman Mark Crockett said. "It's an emergency issue, it's a public-safety issue, and we simply must do for our residents what we need to do to make this work. ... If we cannot solve the issues within VECC, then there is no more time to get horrible outcomes because we don't have 911 being responded to the way it was meant to."

UFA Chief Don Berry said the lag time that it takes to transfer county 911 calls to the appropriate agency is dangerous, especially when the calls are dealing with fires. The sheriff's office is creating a proposal for UFA to leave VECC, but no decisions have so far been made.

"We're paying very close interest to this, and we're waiting to see what happens with Salt Lake County," Berry said. "If the decision is made to move to the (Salt Lake County Emergency Operations Center), the logical decision would be for the UFA to move there as well."

While Winder says the county's emergency center is state of the art and able to accommodate the entire county with a seamless transition, VECC Executive Director William Harry says separating the county's 911 calls and removing the UFA from VECC would be chaotic and damaging to county residents.

VECC handles 911 dispatch calls for police, fire and emergency medical services for Draper, Midvale, Murray, Sandy, South Jordan, South Salt Lake, West Jordan, West Valley City and Salt Lake County. Some of the entities that belong to VECC also have agreements with the UFA to handle fires in their area. Harry said removing the UFA from VECC would create too much confusion between all of the dispatch centers.

"That's the biggest downside of this," Harry said. "It throws interoperability and mutual aid back 20 years because we won't have that interoperability anymore. ... My primary concern is, if we split the 911 calls up, the way the county is designed with overlapping areas, there's going to be poor response in each of those areas."

Harry said he welcomes discussion from the council about the issue, which is a scheduled item on today's VECC Board of Trustees meeting agenda.



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"Our job is to support the agencies' needs," Harry said. "If they change, then we'll change as well."