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Regional District of Fraser-Fort George – New and Enhanced Fire Dispatch System

Overview:

On February 28, 2007 the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George's new Computer Aided Dispatch/Records Management System was deployed in a live dispatch environment at our Fire Operations Communication Centre located in Prince George Fire Hall #1.

The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George now provides enhanced dispatch services for fire departments in our region and departments in the Cariboo Regional District.

In the fall of 2007 the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George will start to provide contracted dispatch services to fire departments in the Kitimat-Stikine Regional District.

The newly deployed CAD/RMS system allows our FOCC to provide an enhanced level of fire dispatch services to our clients which results in greater accuracy in the information being received from a caller, enhanced dispatch notification regarding the location of the call and increased response logic immediately available to the dispatchers who are managing the call. Ultimately the new system allows for increased dispatch efficiency which is beneficial to both the public and the responding fire/rescue departments.

How the 9-1-1 Service and Regional Dispatch Services Work:

911 calls for service from the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George and the Cariboo Regional District are routed by Telus to the RCMP at Prince George. The 911 call taker at that location quickly determines the caller's location and which service they require.

Police calls are transferred to a designated call taker within the same centre, while calls for the BC Ambulance Service are transferred to the regional dispatch office in Kamloops. Calls for any of the Fire Departments within the RDIFFG and the CRD are transferred immediately to the Fire Operations Communications Centre [FOCC].

THE FOCC is managed by the RDIFFG, while FOCC Dispatchers are members of the City of Prince George Fire Department. The FOCC is located in the City of Prince George Fire Hall No. 1.

Where the caller is reporting a fire emergency the dispatcher is guided in part by an agency designation along with ANI [automatic number information] and ALI [automatic location information] which accompanies the transferred phone call. This information [the caller's name, phone number and location] can be utilized as the location of the incident, once this is verified by the caller. The dispatcher then asks one or more questions to determine the type and severity of the incident before assuring the caller that help will be sent immediately and then disconnecting from the caller.

The Integrated CAD and RMS system:

For all calls requiring the response of one or more Fire Departments, dispatchers at the FOCC utilize the CAD system to enter a location and an incident type to create a 'dispatchable' incident. The technology contained within the CAD system allows for a location to be an exact street address, a hundred block on a road, an intersection, an X-Y coordinate or a common place name. Each of these possible locations will in turn cause the CAD to display a map of the appropriate area, centered on the incident location.

In addition to providing precise location information, the CAD also matches an incident type, or example a structure fire, and recommends the appropriate number and type of units for the incident. Once the CAD recommendation is checked and validated by the dispatcher, alert tones are sent and the dispatch information is transferred by voice to the responding units. As part of the dispatch process, FOCC staff also has the ability to review building pre-plans and hazard as well as other information stored within the associated Records Management System and to pass this information to responding units in addition to the incident location.

Describe the process and time lines for design and installation of the new system, include any partners and contractors and their role.

The RDFFG retained Dave Mitchell & Associates Ltd. as consultants for the implementation of the CAD based on their extensive experience with similar projects in BC and Alberta. Implementation of the CAD and RMS took approximately 18 months, starting with the development of a detailed statement of user requirements in late 2005.

The project team included representatives of the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George as well as the City of Prince George and the Prince George Fire/Rescue Department. A detailed 12-month project plan was developed with FDM Software, the system vendor and weekly project meetings commenced in February 2006.

There were a number of key phases to the project, each of which was required for the system to operate as described in the user requirements. These included creating digitized street data for all roads in both regional districts, as well as 'creating' each separate Fire Department and Road Rescue Society as discrete jurisdictions within the CAD system, each in turn with all units and response plans that were required for any type of emergency and non-emergency incident. Implementation of the system also required the renovation of the FOCC to accommodate significantly upgraded computer workstations with three additional flat screen monitors. Finally, the power supply and network connectivity were upgraded.

Benefits of the new system:

Public safety is greatly enhanced by the ability of the dispatchers to use the full range of tools within the CAD system to quickly pinpoint the location of any emergency. Once the location is determined, the CAD also has the ability to instantly search through all available units, matching them with pre-determined response plans to provide a recommendation for the best response. Service to the public is also enhanced because of the way in which the CAD system can store and retrieve elements of 'local knowledge' and make them available at any time.

First responders benefit from a number of features in the CAD system including the ability to instantly review pre-plans, the storage of hazardous materials and details regarding building construction as well as its inspection history. First responders also benefit from the quickest possible identification of the location and in the near future, the opportunity for an automated link with the BCAS CAD system to further enhance first medical responder calls.

Local government benefits in a number of ways including the cost-effective way in which the RDFFG fire dispatch system can provide contract dispatch for additional Fire Departments, recovering funding to support the implementation of the CAD and subsequent upgrades. Implementation of the CAD system also directly addresses the need to provide consistent service to the public in compliance with contemporary standards of service.

Next Steps and Future Plans:

The RDFFG Board of Directors' Strategic Priorities identifies Public Safety as an important area for continued service provision to our current FOCC clients. The Board also views the FOCC as an emerging economic opportunity for our organization. The RDFFG intends to market Fire Dispatch services to other local governments in and around Northern British Columbia and use the economies of scale to lower the per capita costs for the provision of fire dispatch services in our region.

In order to successfully implement the new CAD/RMS system the RDFFG and the City of Prince George agreed to a new relationship regarding the development, installation, on-going maintenance and support for the hardware and software upgrades that were necessary as part of this project.

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