

Mobile County improves public safety with mobile PSAP

Mobile command unit aids in major event, natural disaster response

Mobile County in south Alabama has unique needs when it comes to public safety. While it is home to more than 412,000 residents, during its annual Mardis Gras celebration it welcomes an estimated 1.2 million attendees in a small, dense area in the city of Mobile. It's also a coastal county and home to Dauphin Island and the Port of Mobile, with hundreds of thousands of beachgoers and cruise ship passengers as well as seasonal hurricane threats.

The Mobile County Communications District (MCCD) handles about 350,000 calls every year across 15 partner

agencies in the area. It also provides mutual dispatch aid to neighboring counties and smaller regional dispatch centers when needed.

To ensure timely emergency assistance and 911 service continuity during large population swells and natural disasters, the MCCD, a longtime Hexagon customer, launched its Mobile Command Unit, which contains a public safety answering point (PSAP) and supporting emergency response technologies.





Transforming dispatch operations

Before the launch of the mobile unit, the MCCD relied on a landbound dispatch center to serve a population that grows significantly during peak events and tourist season and respond before, during, and after weather emergencies. The area could have several significant events happening simultaneously, putting a strain on the MCCD's PSAP capabilities and the efforts of first responders.

Powered by Hexagon's computer-aided dispatch (CAD) solution, MCCD's mobile unit first rolled in August 2020, enabling MCCD to transform its operations to meet the needs of any situation. In addition to having the CAD system onboard, the unit has P25 radio, multiple satellite connections, and allows for internet connectivity. It also contains an area with a whiteboard, table, chairs, and other necessities for planning or multi-agency meetings before and during an event. The unit is a standalone, self-contained PSAP fully integrated with all of the MCCD's public safety software systems, so it can be used independently or as another seat for the main dispatch center.

The mobile unit can create a geo-fence so only calls within an established perimeter are routed directly to the vehicle. Calls coming into the Mobile Command Unit are answered by a dispatcher, who is seated with representatives of up to four agencies (police, sheriff, EMS, and fire). This staffing and technology setup ensures calls are dispatched appropriately, enables multi-agency collaboration, and provides the dispatcher with more immediate information from the field.

Supporting neighboring communities

In September 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hurricane Sally ravaged the Gulf Coast, particularly Mobile County's neighbors to the east in Baldwin County, who saw almost 30 inches of rain in some areas. The Baldwin County 911 dispatch center, which supports more than 228,000 residents and millions of visitors every year, lost power and internet.

The MCCD's Mobile Command Unit was dispatched to assist, and the unit served as Baldwin County's PSAP to ensure continuity of 911 services until power and internet could be restored.

"The mutual aid response we took part in following Hurricane Sally is a perfect example of the value of our mobile unit," said MCCD Director Charlie McNichol. "We were able to quickly dispatch help to our neighbors in Baldwin County and make sure the residents affected by the storm and its aftermath had access to critical emergency services."

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