

Emergency/public safety dispatching has been an issue for a long time. Prior to 1996, the start of E 911, emergency call taking and dispatching were accomplished at the local level. When E 911 became operational call handling was moved to a state sponsored call handling system (PSAP's) made up of local agencies and State Police.

Call handlers received the emergency call and transferred it to a dispatcher to send to the proper police, fire or emergency medical service personnel also known as emergency service provider (ESP). Thus began the debate over whether a single stage or a two-stage call handling process is best to handle the emergency. Figure 2 illustrates this process.

## Problem

Public safety dispatching means the sending of police, fire, and emergency medical services to a call for an emergency. Dispatching also includes but is not limited to, the handling of administrative calls, responses to radio traffic from ESP's and the management of walk-in traffic at a dispatching location. Public safety dispatching has evolved into a pay for service concept. Unlike the 911 call handling system dispatching does not take a systemic statewide approach for delivering services, which has resulted in the following problems.

- Unfair and inequitable cost of services.
  - Some communities pay and others do not. In 2005 a study of dispatching in Vermont found that 59% of the Vermont agencies contract for Dispatch Services and pay a fee. A large number of agencies do not pay for Dispatch Services meaning services are provided for "free" by the Vermont Department of Public Safety or due to some earlier agreement<sup>1</sup>
  - What is the responsibility of the State in providing public safety services?
    - The public Safety service delivery model includes the receipt of a call for service, the sending of someone to that call, actions taken by that service provider and feedback from that service (See figure 3). The cost of dispatching is just as important as the response or actions taken by the service provider. Yet in smaller communities the costs of dispatching are often absorbed by the State. In 1994 the State of Vermont decided the initial call for an emergency was the responsibility of the State of Vermont. Is it time for the State to combine and regulate the public safety communications process (call taking and dispatching)?
- Lack of a standardized service delivery system.
  - Some dispatching services provide full dispatching services including fire ground support. Others only provide lifeline services and nothing else.
  - No standard protocols exist.
  - Multiple dispatchers may have to be called for one incident. Creating delay. A very inefficient system (See example in Central Vermont).

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<sup>1</sup> State of Vermont Department of Public Safety and Vermont Communications Study Group Dispatch Services Final Report, Macro Corporation, September 2005, page 3-16.

- A lack of personnel exists to fill many positions especially at the State level further contributing to the decrease in standardized service delivery.
- Lack of technology.
  - With individual dispatching centers there often is a lack of system redundancy (VSP PSAP's excluded). Continuity of operations planning is done in some centers, but it is not standardized. Hardening of communication systems making them redundant needs to occur. This will allow for the transfer of calls in the event of a system failure.
  - A risk assessment identifying radio dead spots should be done so radio system can be improved.
  - Broadband and cellular coverage should be enhanced.
  - Computer Aided Dispatching should be implemented.

Computer-aided dispatch (CAD) systems are used by dispatchers, call-takers, and 911 operators to prioritize and record incident calls, identify the status and location of responders in the field, and effectively dispatch responders. Responders in the field can receive messages initiated by CAD systems via their mobile data terminals, radios, and cell phones.

## Why should this problem be addressed today?

Labor shortages and workload issues create a strain on delivering effective public safety communication services. The cost of these services to local communities is based on an unfair cost model. This combined with an inconsistent service delivery model results in a dysfunctional and fragmented system.. Further, without a coordinated systemic response to this problem the new influx of federal funds may result in a piece meal distribution of funds that will only result in long term sustainability costs for local communities.

## Solution

The State of Vermont should use the current E 911 model as an example of creating regional emergency communications centers (RECC). Specifically.

- Create a system of RECC's around the state, which may or may not be PASP's, that are locally, or state operated and connected using technology.
- These RECC's should have a governance structure in place that addresses at a minimum, but is not limited to, the establishment of the center, roles and responsibilities of the parties involved, construction of or location of the site, equipment, administration of the center, operation and maintenance of the RECC.
  - If the regional center is a new location or entity then the provisions of T. 24 V.S.A. Chapter 121 Sub Chapter 03 "Union Municipal Districts", should be followed.
  - If the new RECC is to be in an existing dispatching center a written agreement detailing, but not limited to, the services, costs, decision making authority, operational (including personnel) authority and equipment ownership should be instituted and signed by all parties. When considering an existing center this agreement may be **authoritative or advisory**.
- The State should consider establishing the following for RECC's:
  - operational standards,
  - number of operating positions (dispatching consoles) in each RECC,
  - communication redundancy requirements,

- continuity of operation plans,
- cost reimbursement for the operation of RECC's.
- The State should determine the technology needed to enable a redundant and reliable dispatching system.
  - The State should consider that technology exists today enabling dispatching centers to operate.
  - A governance structure should be in place which establishes and organizational entity that can manage a RECC before investing in a technology solution for a given region.

## Implementation Strategy

Identifying that regulating public safety dispatching services should be a state responsibility is the step. Determining where to place this responsibility within the Vermont Executive Branch bureaucracy needs to be determined and a state level governance entity established. Perhaps expanding the E 911 Board to assume this responsibility may be the solution.

The organizational entity given this function it must be given the necessary staff resources for implementation. The following needs to be accomplished.

- Determination where the regional emergency communication centers should be located.
- Ensure governance is in place. The more financial subsidy that state is engaged the less requirements there may be in an agreement. Operational guidance to the RECC's should always be important.
- Determine the size and staffing of the RECC's.
- Determine the technological solutions necessary to produce a redundant, reliable communication system.
- Consider hiring subject matter experts to assist in establishing a statewide regional emergency communications center system.

It took Vermont 4 years to build and implement an enhanced 911 system. It may take that long to build a statewide dispatching system.

The establishment of a pilot project in a region of the state could be considered.

## Resources

[Laws & Rules | Maine Emergency Services Communication Bureau](#)

[General Law - Part I, Title II, Chapter 6A, Section 18A -18V \(malegislature.gov\)](#)

State of Vermont Department of Public Safety and Vermont Communications Study Group Dispatch Services Final Report, Macro Corporation, September 2005.

Figure 2

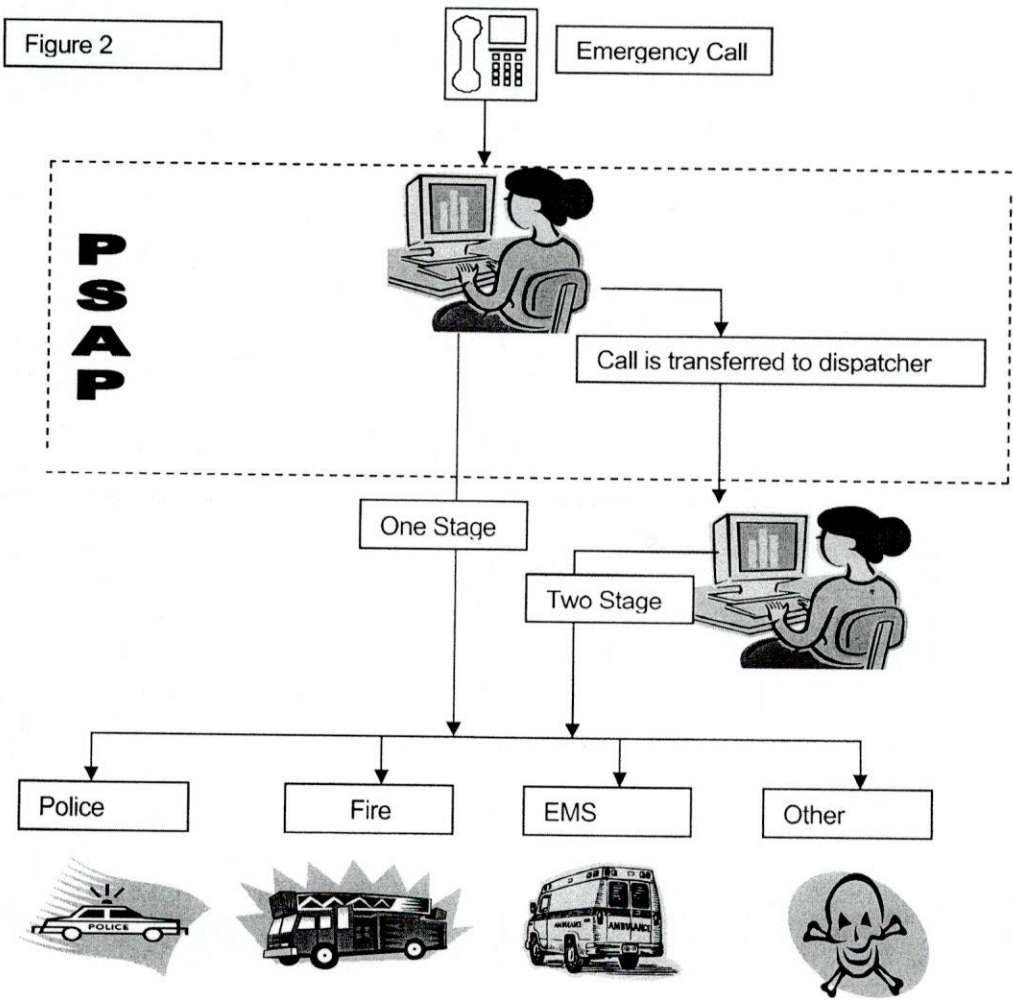
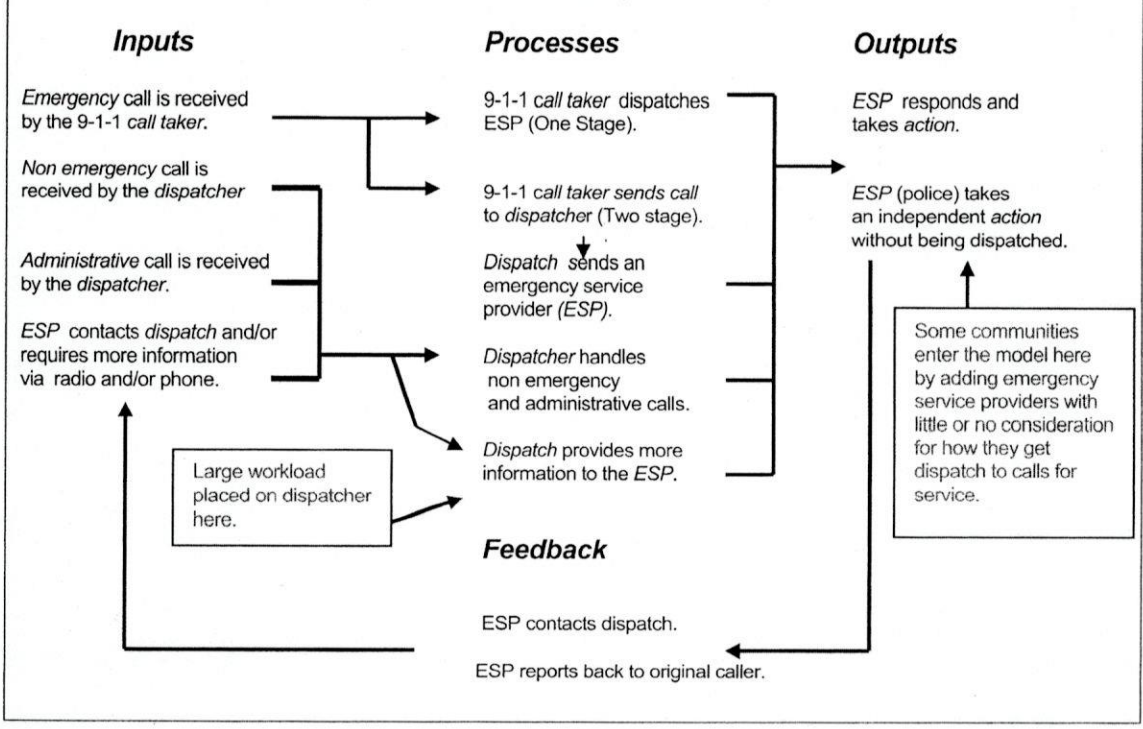


Figure 3

### Public Safety Response as an Input/Output Model



# ILLUSTRATED EXAMPLE OF MULTIPLE DISPATCHING BEING PERFORMED IN CENTRAL VERMONT

