

9-1-1 call takers and emergency dispatchers are often in stressful situations given their central role in emergency response. Exposure to traumatic incidents can overwhelm an individual's ability to cope, but thankfully, post-incident debriefings are becoming more commonplace.

**"It's important for us to help the helper."**

— Dr. Toby Snelgrove, Clinical Psychologist

E-Comm has incorporated the basic principles of Critical Incident stress interventions into the workplace, and has added another component—the Peer Support Team. E-Comm's peer support personnel are trained in basic crisis intervention techniques, which focus to support any staff member affected by what they experience while listening to distressed callers to 9-1-1. Peer Support is a 'grass-roots' motivated initiative, overseen by clinical supervisor Dr. Toby Snelgrove, an expert in the field of traumatic stress.

"There are times when emergency operators involved in overwhelming incidents need some 'emotional first-aid,'" says Snelgrove. "It is important to recognize very difficult calls and for us to 'help the helpers'. Our goal is to have peer counselors on each shift."

The team also provides pre-incident stress education for new employees, to enable them to better understand and handle stressful events generated by the nature of the work that they do.

## 9-1-1 Service for Deaf – Tops in Canada

Since its inception nearly three years ago, E-Comm has become a Canadian leader in answering 9-1-1 calls for members of the deaf community who use Telephone Typewriters (TTY). TTYs allow deaf callers to communicate with 9-1-1 operators through electronic messaging.

Before E-Comm, emergency communication centres were responsible for independently handling TTY calls, and not all centres were equipped for this. E-Comm worked with the deaf community to determine where improvements were needed, and soon discovered this segment of society had a list of issues, problems and concerns surrounding 9-1-1 and the associated response of police, fire and ambulance agencies.

A standing TTY User Committee was established approximately two years ago and includes members of both the deaf community and emergency services.

### Improvements

- More TTY units are now available (up from two to nine) to respond to incoming TTY calls. E-Comm now acts as 'translator' to the agency the caller requires.
- All calls from a TTY are now captured on a voice logging system and can be retrieved if necessary.
- A recorded announcement has been developed advising a callers through the TTY that they have reached 9-1-1 and to remain on the line.

The committee is currently working on creating training materials for the 9-1-1 operators, as well as organizing a May 3rd, 2002 Town Hall meeting for members of the deaf community. The focus of the Town Hall meeting is 9-1-1 and the service it provides, and will include presentations from emergency services personnel. For more information on the town hall meetings visit [www.gvad.com](http://www.gvad.com)



9-1-1 call-taker Sean Collier with GVAD representative Peggy Fee



Traumatic stress expert, Dr. Toby Snelgrove

Photo: Keith Montgomery, E-Comm

# Port Moody Fire Moves to New Dispatch

Port Moody Fire & Rescue has become the second emergency agency in British Columbia to transition onto a new computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system that greatly enhances fire-rescue and other emergency operations. Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services, the first agency, went "live" on the system in September 2001.

Emergency calls for Port Moody are now being dispatched by Vancouver Fire & Rescue (VF&RS) until both agencies transition into E-Comm in July. Previously, the Port Moody police department dispatched Port Moody firefighters and information pertinent to emergency response was in paper form.

Port Moody moved to VF&RS on February 11, 2002 in a collaborative effort that involved technical experts from Port Moody Fire & Rescue, Vancouver Fire & Rescue and E-Comm.

The first call logged for Port Moody fire, a medical-aid call, came at 1313 hrs that same day.

"The Port Moody Fire Department has been looking forward to the benefits of this new system and now that it is in place, we feel that it has exceeded our expectations," said Deputy Fire Chief Patrick Downey. "We look forward to the next phase of this project which includes transitioning Port Moody and Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services into the E-Comm facility."

Downey also added that the use of the new CAD system would increase public safety in Port Moody. "Our firefighters now have access to information that will not only help us better protect the public and their property, but also the firefighters them-



Port Moody Deputy Fire Chief Patrick Downey

selves. Ultimately that makes for a better and safer community."

The PRC Altaris CAD is designed to provide swift and easy access to a wide range of information critical to emergency response including a Geographical Information System (GIS) that quickly pinpoints residential and business phone numbers and addresses, detailed street maps, floor plans and a chemical and hazardous waste materials database. Through the CAD system, information can be transmitted immediately from the dispatcher to emergency responders in the field.

The system has been outfitted with all of Port Moody's local information, including street maps, building location information and hazardous materials information. Previously, this information was only available in paper form but can now be accessed in seconds.

**"Our firefighters now have access to information that will not only help us better protect the public and their property, but also the firefighters themselves."**

— Port Moody Deputy Fire Chief Patrick Downey

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Connecting You with Emergency Communications

## E-Comm Completes First Phase of Radio Network

An E-Comm milestone was reached in April when "Phase One" of the Wide-Area Radio System was completed. Coverage now extends throughout the GVRD. When phases two and three are finished, projected for 2004 or earlier, the final coverage footprint will extend more than 33,000 square kilometres (from Whistler to Boston Bar) of British Columbia.

The last of the "original 18" municipalities that signed up for the E-Comm radio system came onboard following the successful transitions of RCMP detachments in Surrey (the largest in the GVRD), White Rock and Langley in March and April.

In May, the New Westminster Police Service, the first municipality outside of the "original 18," joins the system and for New Westminster Police Chief Lorne Zapotichny, the timing could not be better.

The New Westminster Police Service is currently using a 30-year old analog radio system that has gone through many upgrades but still does not provide the reliable communication police need. A number of dead spots in coverage have been identified throughout New Westminster but with the E-Comm radio system, those coverage holes will be eliminated.

"Our radios are so old and antiquated that you cannot even find parts for them anymore. It's been a real band-aid solution for us," says Chief Zapotichny. "And there have been a couple of instances when officer safety was severely compromised. That's the straw that finally broke the camel's back."

In one instance, a police constable who pulled over a person with a long history of dangerous criminal activity could not hear the dispatcher who was detailing the criminal's background over the radio. Fortunately, other police members on duty knew their colleague was not receiving the transmission as they were, and they rushed to the

Story continued on inside. See "Radio Network."



New Westminster Police Chief Zapotichny and Constable Lori Jackson

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e-communique

## Message from Ken Shymanski, President



It's been a busy six months for us all since I joined E-Comm and I owe a great deal of thanks to E-Comm's staff for their enthusiastic welcome and for helping to familiarize me with the entire operation. There is much to report.

Calls to 9-1-1 continue to be on the rise with E-Comm call-takers responding to more than 1.26 million calls for service in 2001. We are exceeding our call-answer mandate and are now answering 98% of all calls within the first ring (that's 3-6 seconds). Those outcomes are second to none in North America.

It has been a very exciting time for E-Comm's Wide Area Radio System as Phase One of the project was completed. Radio coverage now extends throughout the GVRD. The British Columbia Ambulance Service (BCAS) became the first emergency service to use the radio system throughout the GVRD when we transitioned the BCAS "south of the Fraser river." With that transition Richmond has now become the third city in B.C. to link all of its emergency services (the RCMP, Richmond Fire-Rescue Services and BCAS) to the E-Comm radio system. At present the only other cities with this communications capacity are Vancouver and Port Moody.

We are also pleased to welcome RCMP detachments in Surrey, White Rock, and Langley, which transitioned onto the Wide Area Radio System in March and April respectively. It is also with a great deal of pleasure that we welcome the New Westminster Police Service to E-Comm. New Westminster became a "Class A" shareholder in December and will "go live" on the radio system in May 2002.

The February transition of Port Moody Fire-Rescue dispatch to Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services takes us another step closer to dispatching fire services from E-Comm. Plans are underway for E-Comm to assume dispatch duties for the Vancouver, Port

Moody and Sunshine Coast and Whistler fire departments in July. E-Comm has successfully installed two Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) workstations at the BCAS Dispatch Centre. Installing these two training stations provides BCAS staff with the chance to orientate themselves to the new CAD system ahead of the scheduled training and also provides a significant benefit prior to the introduction of the CAD mapping system. Other 2002 transitions include the Vancouver and Port Moody police departments onto the new Altaris CAD.

Phase One of PRIME-BC was also completed with the December "go live" of the Richmond RCMP. They join the Vancouver and Port Moody Police departments in having access to this new and important Record Management System, (RMS), which will revolutionize the sharing of information among emergency agencies.

E-Comm held its first employee survey in early March and I was delighted to learn that we had a 72% response rate. I believe this is an indication of our desire to build an exceptional workplace. My thanks to TELUS for forming a strategic partnership with us and allowing access to its outstanding employee programs.

Now that I am at E-Comm I am more convinced than ever that consolidating emergency communications it is the right thing to do, for the safety of our region's emergency responders and the public. Our job now is to work diligently to develop our business, provide exceptional customer service at a competitive price, create an exceptional workplace and to convince those emergency agencies that have not yet signed on, that they should.

## Radio Network... *continued from cover*

scene. While the police constable remained in control of the situation, the potential of this erupting into a dangerous situation was very real.

"The number one priority for me is the safety of my members," Zapotichny says. "Incidents like that and of course, September 11th, certainly reinforced the need for us to step up the effort to fast-track a new radio system. Fortunately, our city council and police board were 100% behind us."

Zapotichny says the cross-communication capability of the radio system will also prove invaluable to New Westminster because of the city's close proximity to other municipalities such as Surrey, Coquitlam and Burnaby where the E-Comm radio system is in full force. "It is going to make apprehending criminals who cross municipal boundaries much easier," he says, "because for the first

time we will be able to communicate directly with police forces outside our jurisdiction. The impact on public and officer safety is immense.

"Communication is the life line of emergency services and when we send officers out to do their jobs they must be confident they are working with the best tools available. Whether that's a vest, a firearm or radio system."

The E-Comm radio system offers emergency personnel better radio coverage, including in-building coverage, enhanced personnel safety capabilities (emergency buttons), increased reliability, higher peak traffic capacity, and improved security.

More than 3,800 wide-area radios are now active in southwest British Columbia. Currently, the network processes approximately 2.6 million radio transactions each month.

**"The impact on public and officer safety is immense."**

— New Westminster Police Chief Lorne Zapotichny

## PRIME-BC

Richmond RCMP went "live" on PRIME-BC (a new police records management system being implemented by E-Comm) in December. Richmond's successful transition concludes Phase I of PRIME-BC.

"The new system makes it faster and easier for police to receive the information they need to fight crime by changing the way police handle information in the field," says E-Comm's public safety systems manager, Kathy Wunder.

"Police vehicles are now outfitted with laptop computers so officers can access information stored in national police databases, such as the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) and the National Criminal Information Centre (NCIC)," adds Wunder.

Police also have access to information from international agencies, such as Interpol and closer to home, ICBC.

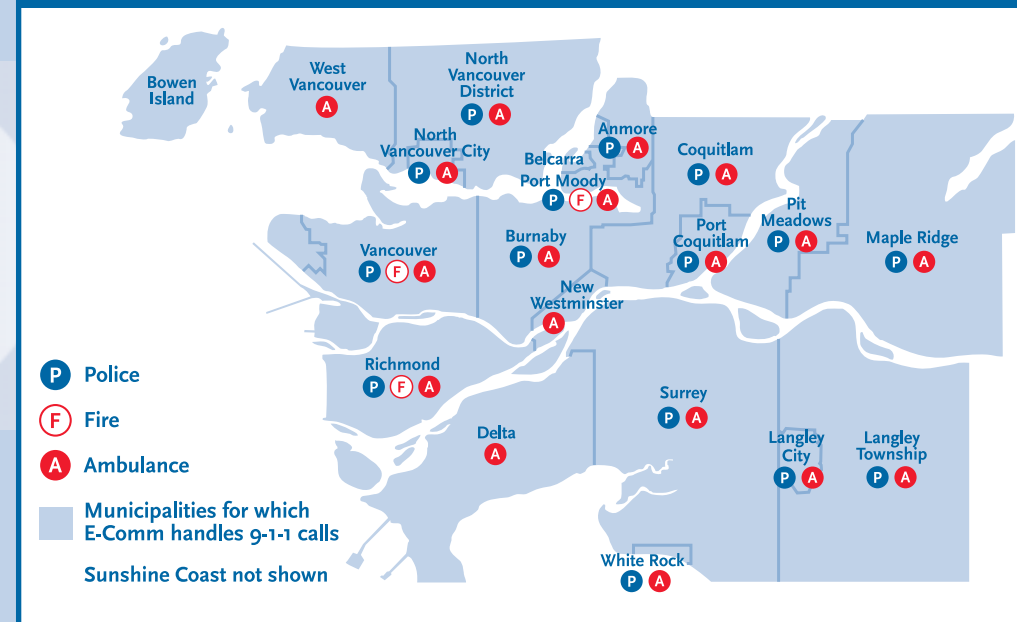
Instant access to information will greatly enhance investigations and keep emergency personnel and the public safer because police are now able to quickly gather intelligence that will assist them in apprehending criminals, preventing crime and diffusing dangerous situations. It will also help with cross-jurisdictional criminal investigations because information is shared

seamlessly and in real time between agencies that use PRIME-BC. Information such as criminal records, mug shots, and investigation notes, 9-1-1 calls and dangerous-goods data, are all at an officer's fingertips.

**"PRIME-BC makes it faster and easier for police to receive the information they need to fight crime."**

— Kathy Wunder, E-Comm Public Safety Systems Manager

## Agencies Using E-Comm's Wide-Area Radio System



Sergeant Daryl Wiebe, Vancouver Police Department

### Number of 9-1-1 calls to E-Comm\*

November 2001	95,789
December 2001	100,360
January 2002	83,079
February 2002	73,540
March 2002	83,755
<b>Total</b>	<b>436,523</b>

For more information on PRIME-BC visit [www.ecomm.bc.ca](http://www.ecomm.bc.ca)

\* Since the December issue of e-communi qué