

Customer Case Study: Toms River



The Township of Toms River with a population of approximately 100,000 is the 6th largest municipality in New Jersey and the seat of Ocean County. Toms River serves as an evacuation/shelter zone for people living and working within ten miles of the Oyster Creek Nuclear Power Plant and is within commuting distance of the McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst military base.

Ocean County is located south of New York City and just east of Philadelphia and is one of three counties that are part of the popular Jersey Shore recreation area. This makes the Toms River area a favored summer vacation spot. As a result, from Memorial Day through Labor Day, the public safety teams see a vast increase in water-related call-outs. These teams have unique challenges covering the nearby barrier islands including travel through two neighboring towns to provide services to the barrier islands.

The Police Department in Toms River is comprised of over 150 sworn officers and 25 auxiliary members while the Fire Department is made up of six fire companies manned by 350 dedicated volunteers. Together with EMS and other departments they are responsible for an area of about 42 square miles in the Township, nearby towns, inland waterways, and barrier islands.

PROBLEM

The first responders in Toms River were using radio-based paging as their sole dispatch mode. In this environment, dispatches could be difficult to hear, especially in an emergency with dispatchers having to repeat information. The system was not

reliable and reception of pages was inconsistent if a volunteer was out of range or in a building such as a shopping mall.

These delivery issues had the potential to cause delays in communicating critical information to first responders and they highlighted problems in the current dispatch system. It was determined that with 250 – 300 callouts per day, the CAD could not meet current capacity demand. Toms River needed a completely new solution.

SOLUTION

A nine-member committee was formed to study the public safety communications needs of Toms River and surrounding communities. It started with the premise that radio-based paging, while an important element of their communication strategy, had not kept pace with the township's needs. In addition, Toms River wanted to leverage features in newer communications technologies like cell phones and smartphones.

Over a two-year period the committee engaged in a comprehensive process of assessment and research. They determined the needs of the police and fire departments, EMS, Office of Emergency Management as well as other stakeholders. The members compiled a comprehensive list of requirements that included flexibility, scalability and real-time delivery of SMS text to cell phones and smartphones.

The committee concluded that Toms River would be best served by purchasing a new CAD system with the addition of an integrated wireless

notification solution. The committee researched the benefits of CAD systems and associated technologies and after careful consideration, Toms River selected Spillman Technologies for their new CAD system combined with HipLink notification software. "Toms River is a progressive community," said Detective Mike Burke of the Information and Technology Department in the Toms River Police Department. "With our new solution we can reach our teams on smartphones and other devices no matter where they are. We can push out much more data, in real-time and not tie up the air waves."

RESULT

Today, the Toms River public safety teams have a paging solution that meets their need for expanded communication to and between all departments. While keeping the best elements of their radio paging system, Toms River uses the powerful notification capabilities of their new solution to reliably push data to first responders via SMS text to cell phones.

Dispatchers call firefighting teams by zone. Each team member receives both voice and text pages indicating section and zone locations. The SMS text messages include full incident details, for example "100 Main Street, 5th floor, Apartment 25". This is especially helpful in areas that include streets with similar names. With SMS text capability there is no need to repeat address information thus helping eliminate call-backs and reduce radio traffic and ensure a consistent, faster response.

"Recently, the solution proved to be a real life-saver during a call-out to a residential kitchen fire," said Bob Sinnott, Communications Supervisor for the Toms River Fire Department. "During that dispatch, firefighters didn't get the radio page but they did get the text messages sent via HipLink's notification software. The volunteers arrived on-scene quickly despite the radio failure."

The Grouping capabilities in the solution have played an important part in streamlining the communications workflow. When dispatchers assign a police unit to a specific incident, a message is sent to the corresponding Group in HipLink which may include first aid, fire department or EMS personnel related to the incident selected.

Grouping is also used in cases such as structure fires where County arson investigators are notified, and brush fires where the State Forest Fire Service is sent an alert. If a call goes out for a "robbery in progress" or "shots fired" all command-level officers are automatically sent a message when the incident is dispatched.

Toms River also uses their communication solution to coordinate with the Office of Emergency Management. This includes planning and drills for school or nursing home evacuations and severe weather alerts. The effectiveness of the coordination and planning was apparent last year as teams were prepared for Hurricane Irene well in advance of the storm's arrival.

Pleased with progress so far, Toms River will be expanding their use of HipLink to include two-way SMS messaging for greater intercommunication and field-response capabilities. The technology will help teams navigate road closures when responding to a call and assist in EMS routing in case of hospital closures. Two-way communication will help the public safety teams in Toms River update situational status from the field in real-time, manage logistics and deploy resources, while they are protecting the peace and saving lives.

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