

White Paper on the Southwest Regional Communications Center

Many have asked how our tri-city communications center came into being. Here is a brief explanation.

THE FORMATION OF THE SWRCC

In 1998 the City Managers of Lancaster, DeSoto, Cedar Hill, and Duncanville came together to discuss the idea of pooling their public safety resources in an effort to reduce their operational costs. One idea that evolved was what we now know as the Southwest Regional Communications Center.

A year later the Southwest Regional Communications Center opened for business and the grand adventure began. There are many reasons why this partnership has been a good idea for its members. One is that these cities are approximately the size and share similar socioeconomic demographics. They also share similar philosophies regarding public safety service delivery. Another strong reason for this partnership is that each of these cities hold the distinction of being "Home Rule" cities. In 9-1-1 language a Home Rule city provides its citizens 9-1-1 services rather than passing this task to a political sub-division such as 9-1-1 District.

Constructing and maintaining an effective 9-1-1 phone system is a very complex and expensive proposition for any small community. By sharing these costs across the tax base of three cities working in consort, tax payers aren't burdened with a large, long term debt.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, quickly led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Along with the DHS, came many new and innovative philosophies and methods of sharing information resources between public safety organizations. With these new philosophies and methods came grant opportunities for "regional" projects. Since the creation of SWRCC is a regional effort, grants became available to help offset some of the major costs of the organization.

During the first quarter of 2005, SWRCC launched its regional public safety software system, purchased with federal grant funds. It is the foundation for the entire SWRCC project, and provides almost instantaneous access to regional public safety information. Additionally, this public safety software system provides wireless access to every police and firefighting vehicle in each of the three Cities.

By 2006, sufficient need was demonstrated to support the construction of a WAN (or wide area fiber optic network) at the SWRCC allowing each city to easily access the main frame located at SWRCC headquarters as if it were in their own building.

Early 2007, the concept of Residential Alarm Monitoring became a hot topic in the tri-cities area. By upgrading and expanding the aging alarm monitoring system, the SWRCC was able to offer "U. L. Approved" service (United Laboratory). Today, the SWRCC Alarm Monitoring Service is the only Alarm Monitoring service south of Highland Park, Texas that offers its citizens the privilege of connecting directly to the Police and Fire Dispatch systems. This feature alone dramatically cuts response time. A triggered residential alarm automatically dials the SWRCC monitoring receiver which answers on the first ring. A data string identifies the citizen and the nature of the alarm which in-turn automatically populates a "call for service" screen on the radio dispatch console. In short, it can't be done any faster, anywhere.

Recently, the SWRCC launched its new Public Safety Radio Network project. This three tower, fifteen channel, UHF narrow band radio network is being constructed on the MPT1327 radio protocol, which is a world standard. This project is another example of how by pooling resources and partnering these three cities can purchase a better product together than any of them can alone. Unlike many of the surrounding cities, radio interoperability has been designed into this new SWRCC Radio Network and not a mere add-on. The completion of this project will provide yet another example of why the SWRCC is a model of technology partnership.

FUNDING FOR THE SWRCC

The relative populations of the three member cities is remarkably similar allowing an even three way split of the cost to operate the SWRCC. However a revisit of the cost-sharing each year assures the practice remains relevant and fair. In the future, there will likely be a disparity due to population shifts. At that time cost sharing will be adjusted accordingly.

Since our member cities are Home Rule, all 9-1-1 fees are paid directly to each member city, who in-turn channel these funds to the SWRCC to off-set operating costs of the 9-1-1 Center. 9-1-1 fees are used for the sole purpose of providing 9-1-1 services, but frankly the fees alone don't come close to covering the three million dollar SWRCC annual operating budget. Alarm monitoring fees are an additional source of revenue. When our citizens realize the full value of this service and use it, we expect alarm monitoring fees will begin to offset a significant portion of our operating costs.

OVERSIGHT OF THE SWRCC

There are multiple layers of oversight to keep the SWRCC moving in the right direction. The three City Managers provide general oversight and budget approval. While the day to day operation falls to the Managing Director. The Director is responsible to interact with department heads insuring a continuity of service. This must be performed while being sensitive to the individual needs of the member agencies. Internal responsibilities of the Director include direct management of the operating budget, management of a lengthy list of service and maintenance contracts, information technology support, radio system support, and 9-1-1 phone system support. Project management is also a major task as the SWRCC is constantly growing and expanding its service.

A standing committee of Assistant Chiefs representing each city oversees processes and procedures which allow the SWRCC to constantly fine tune its service delivery to the changing needs of the suburban atmosphere. Additionally, periodic meetings with all department heads allow a forum for growth and understanding among public safety officials.

STAFFING OF THE SWRCC

Currently the SWRCC employs thirty two full-time personnel and operates continuously twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, year round. Additionally, the twenty nine State Certified Public Safety Dispatchers are crossed trained as Emergency Medical Dispatchers. This EMD status assures our citizens that they can expect to receive valuable, life-saving, pre-arrival instructions when calling 9-1-1 with a medical emergency.

Our administrative staff consists of the Director, the Communications Center Manager, and a Senior Secretary. Technology, radio, and phone support is outsourced. In addition, the SWRCC relies heavily on the City of DeSoto to provide financial support in the form of payroll and purchasing, as well as Human Resources support, and facility maintenance which is critical to our operation.

THE LOCATION OF THE SWRCC

The SWRCC is located at 200 S. Parks Drive in DeSoto, which is the former location of the DeSoto Police Department. This relatively non-descript, compact building provides the perfect environment required to support the specialized mission of the SWRCC.

THE MISSION OF THE SWRCC

It is the mission of the Southwest Regional Communication Center:

“To facilitate the delivery of emergency services with professionalism and integrity, through the efficient, reliable collection and dissemination of critical information to the citizens and agencies we serve.”

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SWRCC

For more information, you are invited to visit the SWRCC website at www.swrcc.net or simply follow our link from the home page of any of our Member Cities.