Spillman in Action: Whitcom 911 Center, Pullman, Washington

overview

To successfully consolidate dispatching and record keeping, the Whitcom 911 Center hosts Spillman's integrated software solutions for computer-aided dispatch (CAD), records management, and fire/EMS management on a single server. In all, Whitcom provides dispatch services to more than 50 agencies.

challenge

To manage public safety operations along the Washington/Idaho border, local officials formed the Whitcom 911 consolidated dispatch center. “We live in an area commonly referred to as the ‘quad cities.’ It’s divided into four major towns bordering two states and four counties,” said Sheriff Brett Myers, of Whitman County. “The same people in one jurisdiction travel throughout the region and interact with those in another jurisdiction, so we often investigate cases that are common to some or all agencies in the region.”

Not only did regional officials want one computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system to manage dispatch for more than 50 agencies, but they also wanted a single-source database for records management. “One dispatch center controls the activities of many different jurisdictions that already work together in joint task forces and other projects,” said Patti VonBargen, Whitcom Director. “It seemed natural to take those agencies and turn them into one agency using the same integrated computer system.”

solutions and benefits

Collaboration Across State Lines
Whitcom officials selected Spillman Technologies to implement CAD, records management, and fire/EMS solutions that enable users to collaborate with dispatchers and share information with neighboring agencies.

Because Washington and Idaho each have unique reporting requirements, statutes, and interfaces, the software application had to be flexible to meet the needs of each state’s agencies. “As a multi-county dispatcher serving two states, we were dealing with dual state interfaces and statutes,” said VonBargen. “Spillman was the product that we felt would meet the needs of the agencies as we attempted to become a regional 911 center.”

Five contributing agencies, the Whitman County Sheriff’s Office, Moscow Police Department, Pullman Police Department, Asotin County Sheriff’s Office, and the Washington State University Police, are all linked to a single-server database hosted at Whitcom. Contributing agencies can enter, edit, and store data according to custom system privileges. Other agencies in the region have view-only access or receive information from dispatchers as needed.

“I don’t know of any other cities that border other states that have the ability to share information like we do,” said Officer Ernest Sanders of the Pullman Police Department. “Before using Spillman software, if we needed information from another agency, we had to call our dispatchers who in turn would call the other agency’s dispatchers and fax information to us. Now, we just type the name into a computer and the information appears.”
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Coordinating Dispatch Operations
Information about a person, vehicle, or property item is linked to associated records throughout the system, making searching easy. For instance, dispatchers can quickly search and retrieve information for field officers.

“Our dispatchers do a wonderful job searching for information that our officers require,” said Chief Steve Hansen, Washington State University. “They can search a partial license plate description during a hit-and-run collision and relay vehicle information to officers in a very short time.”

Furthermore, using Spillman’s software, Whitcom has become a paperless 911 center. “When we started using Spillman software, one of our goals was to have a paperless system,” said Pam Smith, Whitcom Dispatch Supervisor. “Today, every dispatcher at every station has access to logs, response plans, and other resources without relying on hard copies for anything.”

Spillman also keeps Whitcom up to date with technology. “One of the important issues nationwide is that of Phase II Wireless compliance,” said VonBargen. Using Spillman, dispatchers can receive the longitude and latitude coordinates from a cell phone call and plot the location of the caller on a map. “We are actually live with Phase II Wireless throughout the county and also in the state of Idaho,” said VonBargen.

Improving Response Times
Because Whitcom serves so many agencies, it would be impossible for each dispatcher to know all the policies, procedures, and state requirements for every scenario. Additionally, accessing such information could take several minutes. However, using Spillman’s software, dispatchers have instant access to special instructions, premises information, and recommended units to direct response teams in a timely manner. Having accessible information is critical to protecting lives and promoting faster responses by field personnel.

“We had a recent homicide case in a neighboring state where the suspects were spotted leaving the scene,” said Myers. “Because the Whitcom dispatcher could coordinate the information with other dispatchers in the same facility, the suspects were apprehended almost immediately. Had there been a 20- to 30-minute delay in this case, these suspects would not have been captured,” he said.

Maximizing Resources
Many of the agencies in the region have to do more with fewer officers. At Washington State University, officers learn to move quickly from case to case. “I have 17 officers and they’re all very good. An officer may be assigned to work a minor theft case one minute and then work a major assault the next,” said Hansen. The WSU police use Spillman’s case management to keep track of their cases from start to finish. “We don’t have the luxury of waiting for the detectives and a crime scene unit. We get to do everything and Spillman helps officers track where they are, what they need to do, and where they’re headed,” Hansen said.

To assist some of the smaller agencies that cover a large jurisdiction, Whitcom dispatchers are utilized to conduct queries and information checks through the Spillman database. “We have all the information at our fingertips to easily look up suspects and activities in any jurisdiction and relay that out to everyone we dispatch for,” said VonBargen.

System Integration
The integration between the CAD and records modules automatically populates data fields from CAD to records simultaneously as a call taker enters the information. System integration saves time for dispatchers, records clerks, and field personnel. “Spillman has several different modules and everything connects together,” said Smith. “When I go to look up someone’s name, everything they’ve been involved with, whether it’s a car that they own, a citation they’ve received, or something they’ve reported, is easily accessible from one record. I can find the right information quickly.”

about spillman
Spillman Technologies meets the individual needs of public safety professionals with a full suite of solutions. The software is installed at more than 700 agencies nationwide.