



WAUKESHA COUNTY
ACTION NETWORK

June 9, 2006

Waukesha County Communication Center

Report and Recommendations

To County Executive Dan Vrakas

WCAN PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

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Introduction

In July of 2005 The Waukesha County Action Network (WCAN) observed significant dissention between county leadership and public safety providers (referred throughout this report as PSAP's public safety answering points) regarding the newly formed Waukesha County Communications Center (WCC). WCAN's Public Safety Committee believed the conflict was a major barrier to the region's quickly developing solutions to providing effective emergency services.

Background

In November 2001, County Executive Dan Finley presented Waukesha County law enforcement officials and communities with a plan to consolidate dispatch services. Mr. Finley believed it not only would be cost effective but would provide more efficient delivery of dispatch services thereby improving public safety in the county. A deadline date of December, 2002 was set for communities to join the center. In July of 2002 a report titled "Waukesha County Consolidated Dispatch Proposal" was submitted to the County Executive, signed by ten public safety officials. It should be noted that the City of Brookfield was the only additional community to become a member of the WCC as of 2006.

As with any newly formed organization, it takes time to perfect operations. In a county that has grown to the third most populated in the state, with 37 individual municipalities, some of which still manage emergency services with volunteers, the challenge of delivering public safety services can be daunting. WCAN believes that having private sector leadership review the processes involved in providing public emergency management from their business perspective would add value. WCAN also believed that serving as a neutral party and facilitator would be instrumental in fostering dialogue between all parties to resolve the issues surrounding the provision of emergency services which would contribute to enhanced public safety.

Study Approach

- A: WCAN met with then County Executive Dan Finley
- B: WCAN met with the management staff of the WCC
- C: WCAN met with the newly elected County Executive Dan Vrakas
- D: WCAN met with the PSAP's as a group
- E: WCAN met with the PSAP's individually and including some of their elected officials.
- F: WCAN interviewed the Directors of other communication centers
- G: WCAN researched several national emergency management models

Findings and recommendations

Interview Findings with PSAP's and WCC -

The APCO study focused mainly on the WCC itself and how it might improve the services it provides. While we agree with the findings and recommendations of the APCO study, we also were desirous to address a broader issue. Is Waukesha County proceeding in the right direction and is a single centralized dispatch center the best solution for the entire County? There are 37 municipal bodies in Waukesha County and currently 29 of those are served by the WCC. The eight other communities which still have their own PSAPs and represent approximately a population of 189,114 or 50.1% of the County's population. These communities still pay for the WCC which is the sole receiver of 911 cell phone calls being dispatched within the county. Why didn't they join? What would make them reconsider?

Results of discussions with the PSAP communities followed a repetitive theme:

- The communities felt there were many unanswered questions at the time the WCC was formed.
- Strong personalities on both sides were unable to resolve their differences within the time constraints of forming the WCC.
- After a community decided not to join the WCC, it was disenfranchised from the decision making process of the WCC even though the WCC was providing it with some services such as 911 dispatching.
- All of the PSAP communities agree that they would view the WCC differently if they saw openness to change and continuing improvements in the WCC operation.
- The PSAP communities are eager to be part of the decision making process to help improve the WCC and to help find solutions to some of the unresolved issues.
- Some of the communities have already committed to or have installed new equipment, which they want to utilize, and would consider joining when the equipment has served its useful life.

We view the APCO study and the recent actions by the County as a positive step toward establishing an efficient and effective dispatch center. While the APCO study had many recommendations which we support and will help WCC overcome its growing pains and increase its level of service, we believe some recommended actions need to be expanded upon or given higher priority to further enhance the quality of the services to the region.

- 1) All of the communities within Waukesha County should be included in the decision making process to improve the system. An opportunity that has a common interest among all the agencies and would be an appealing way to start a team effort is the Records Management System (RMS). A regional RMS which is compatible with the surrounding counties would vastly improve our public safety and save all of the respective departments a considerable amount of time. All discussions related to the RMS and corresponding CAD issues must take into account the needs and uniqueness of all the existing and future members and address them however possible. Working collectively with all Waukesha County communities along with representatives of the surrounding counties to solve this issue, would go a long way toward building the trust necessary to gain long-term regional cooperation.**
- 2) Much of the APCO report centered on the training needs and the excessive turnover of WCC staff. We support the establishment and staffing of the position of a training and operations manager. This position, along with the recommended psychological testing of possible new hires by a organizational psychologist, will assist in obtaining the best qualified staff and developing a structured training program. We also support the 17% overstaffing of the WCC to help minimize the current disruption caused by the high staff turnover rate.**
- 3) Waukesha County and its surrounding counties have an extensive hospital and emergency care system. Depending on the situation, the timing and type of event, the availability of these facilities and their physicians varies. The hospitals have been working together to develop a better tracking system to make sure the injured individual can be taken directly to the nearest available facility that has space and physicians best suited for the specific injury. A study committee made up of WCC management, members of WCC and future members of WCC should join with the hospital group to develop an overall communication system that is available to WCC for use in routing emergency care needs.**
- 4) Many of the APCO recommendations will take some time to implement, measure and readjust before significant improvements can occur. Until the WCC systems are matured to a point that satisfies the APCO recommendations, we suggest that no new members be allowed to join WCC. However, the WCC should immediately begin discussion with the communities which are currently not members to work toward a long range plan for the future possibility of all of them joining the WCC. This plan should work toward accommodating both the individual communities' equipment life and the County's capital improvement plan for expansion of the WCC facility that will be required to accommodate expanded participation.**

- 5) Training was identified by the APCO study as a focal point for WCC. WCCAN recommends WCC seek available resources for programs that can address immediate and then future emergency preparedness.
- Department of Homeland Security offers Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program. This is a 20-hour course, delivered over a seven-week period. Training sessions cover disaster preparedness, disaster fire suppressions, basic disaster medical operations, and light search and rescue, and team operations. The CERT course is taught in the community by a trained team of first responders or by FEMA's Emergency Management Institute in Maryland.
 - The National Academies of Emergency Dispatch offer several educational courses in Communications Center Management. The core curriculum includes, Human Resources, Finance, Customer and Media Relations, Communications Center Operations, Personal Development, Administration, Legal, Managing Technology and Emerging Issues.
- 6) Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) – Interviews produced consistent disappointment with WCC's CAD systems for dispatch and records management. WCCAN's national interviews produced other examples of systems being used to include the following samples. We recommend WCC begin to look at a more friendly system that is compatible regionally.
- TriTech – Recently the City of Minneapolis went to this program and are very happy. TriTech Software Systems specializes in the development of advanced computer software solutions for the public safety industry for police and fire departments, EMS services and private ambulance companies.
 - Priority Dispatch – is a unique research company and the only dispatch system provider with an in-house research and development organization recognized by the National Association of Emergency Dispatch.

National Resources, references and best practices

- **SAFECOM Assessment – Enhancing Statewide Communications Interoperability.** The recommendation we received was to the State of Nevada and could be emulated on a smaller scale and eventually be expanded to the State of Wisconsin. SAFECOM is a communications program of the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC). SAFECOM provides—with its federal partners—research, guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and federal public safety agencies. OIC is managed by the Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate’s Office of Systems Engineering and Development (SED). SAFECOM believes that any successful effort to improve public safety communications interoperability must take into account the views of first responders on the front lines in large, small, rural, and urban communities across this Nation.
- **General equipment upgrades –** The U.S. Department of Justice provides a guide for the selection of communication equipment for emergency responders. We have information available which can be shared with all the parties.
- **WCAN interviewed other consolidated dispatch centers to evaluate best practices by others.** We have additional information which can be presented at the appropriate time.