While this example does not deal specifically with roadway lighting, it does point out the role dispatchers play in the scheme of things. Whether lighting, hazards, crimes, emergencies or mere suspicions, each needs to be treated according to established professional standards.

**VoIP – Part 2**

In the last issue, we described the problem. Voice over Internet Protocol is being marketed both as an adjunct to home and business telephone service, as well as a replacement. But don’t expect calls to 911 to go through, or to reach the right PSAP, or to carry ANI-ALI.

In an effort to resolve the problem, the FCC issued an order in May 2005 requiring that certain VoIP providers supply enhanced 911 emergency calling capabilities to their customers as a mandatory feature of the service. To see the content of that order, go to [www.fcc.org](http://www.fcc.org).

Even with this action by the FCC, much remains to be done. Assume that the VoIP provides a connection to 911. In the short term, it may be necessary for phone users to notify their VoIP where they are at any given time. (They must be kidding!) The VoIP, by necessity, may have to contact PSAPs through the agency’s 10-digit phone number, rather than by way of 911 trunks. Such lines may have low-priority answering. (“May have”? I’d laugh if this wasn’t so serious.)

It would appear also that the FCC’s VoIP order pertains to VoIP, while the industry is considering a variety of other alternative phone schemes. If you think that VoIP is the final technological telephone enhancement, think again.

Sadly, the coordination of 911 services has been lacking. Wireline phone service and “traditional” 911 have been the purview of each state’s public utility commission (or similar agency). Wireless 911 falls under the jurisdiction of the FCC. It is not clear to me how or why Internet services should be an FCC responsibility, but they have taken on that role, and that is a good thing.

In the last issue, we also urged agencies to develop a policy for how to handle misrouted calls that might come to your PSAP. Some agencies may refuse to accept such calls on the basis that it takes too long to resolve them.

For example, if a dispatcher in Kentucky receives a call from a VoIP user in California saying that his house is on fire, how will you handle it? Will you try to forward the call to the proper agency? Which one? How will you know? What happens if you lose the call? Should you take all the information first just in case? Will you refuse the call telling the caller they reached the wrong number? When the news media receives a copy of your logging tape the next day, will you be able to justify whatever action you took?

Don’t wait for your dispatchers to deal with the inevitable at 3 a.m. some weekend. Develop a reasonable policy today.


**Puzzled?**

Let’s see if I have this straight. Our agency just purchased one of those “reverse 911” systems – aka a community notification system. If you need to evacuate the town, or part of it, or alert specific people to some problem, or recall your troops, this is what you’d use. Okay so far?

Fact: Some 5% of the public (so far) have traded in their wireline phones for wireless (i.e., cellular or PCS). More folks are switching to VoIP, and as just noted above, there will be other opportunities and alternatives to the wired phone.

How will the reverse 911 system reach them? There is no directory for wireless phones. If I have an unlisted wired phone, you can contact the phone company at three in the morning (usually) and get a name and address. Not so with wireless and VoIP.

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What impact will this have on our public safety services? Need I ask?

Friendly Recorder
Some dispatchers hate the logging recorder because it records their mistakes. Yes, that’s true. But it can also be your friend.

A dispatcher told us she was being bothered by a colleague who liked to tell off-color stories in the radio room. It came down to her word against his. That is, until she picked up the phone on a recorded line, and that’s all it took. Everything said went onto tape. With that evidence, there was no question about who said what.

Some phones are hot on pickup; some need a button depressed. Some work off headsets. Some require you to clear the dial-tone. Yet nearly every dispatch center uses logging recorders. Find out how your system works, and consider that means if you’re having a problem. Not all logging recorders work the same way.

We’re grateful to the dispatcher for mentioning this. You shouldn’t have to put up with profanity and harassment. Let us put it a different way: You don’t have to.

Circle of Expertise
Many of us have attended a conference or seminar and come away frustrated. We might have sat in back, thought about asking a question, but were afraid that the question would be considered foolish. Very often, there’s more expertise in the audience than at the head table, and why not?

It is no surprise, then, that we see smaller group sessions formed into a circle with only a facilitator. The facilitator determines, through consensus, what topics will be discussed, what priority they will be given, and how much time will be devoted to the topics.

The facilitator’s job is to present the topic, and then assure that every attendee is called on to express a view. Often, the person most reluctant to speak is the one with the most questions. (That would be me!)

What are the advantages? There is no single speaker and no single opinion. By drawing on the entire group, hidden expertise is drawn out and many opinions are expressed. No one leaves without being asked to participate, thereby reducing frustrations. The facilitator’s job is to see that no one dominates the discussion, and that the topic and time constraints are followed.

Circles of Expertise can’t and won’t meet every conference need, and generally should never have more than thirty participants. Even so, it is something to consider. Imagine the people who will return to their agencies to say, “Guess what I learned?”

Questions
What topics would you like discussed here? E-mail suggestions, comments and questions to burton@alanburton.us. Tell us if you want your name used.

Alan Burton has served as a dispatcher, county communications director, and consultant. He is a member of the Josephine County (OR) 911 Agency Governing Board.