

AS SEEN IN



WHEN OFFICERS LISTEN LIVE

Chula Vista (California) Police Department conducts an experiment letting officers hear live-streamed 9-1-1 calls as they are taken in dispatch.

By Carla Even

Live-streaming of 9-1-1 calls directly to first responders has become a hot topic across the public safety spectrum. This year, the Chula Vista Police Department (CVPD) became the first agency in the United States to immediately stream 9-1-1 emergency calls directly to first responders in the field. Officers can instantly hear everything the caller is saying, along with the caller location providing for immediate situational awareness. Officers receive the live-stream but cannot join or speak on the calls.

With limited ability to increase personnel and yet a desire to improve response times, CVPD recognized the opportunity to reimagine how officers obtain information when responding to emergency calls for service.

The idea was conceptualized by Chula Vista Police Capt. William “Fritz” Reber while he was the communications manager for his agency. Inspired by the tragic incident involving 14-year-old Tamir Rice, Captain Reber felt a need to give all the information to responding officers in real-time. Reber contacted the logger company HigherGround which partnered with CVPD to make this technology a reality. CVPD has one of the lowest officers-per-capita statewide and nationally, and often turns to technology to be more efficient. With limited ability to increase personnel and yet a desire to improve response



times, CVPD recognized the opportunity to reimagine how officers obtain information when responding to emergency calls for service. The beta trial-period began in July 2019 and was fully implemented into patrol in May 2020.

During the implementation of the technology to live-stream 9-1-1 calls to officers, CVPD addressed public safety telecommunicator questions and concerns. Telecommunicators were worried that officers would second-guess their decisions and ask numerous questions over the radio, and the new technology would be used to discipline telecommunicators if they made a mistake. The telecommunicators were apprehensive and had many valid questions. Fortunately, live-streaming 9-1-1 calls to officers in the field opened new opportunities to improve service and enhance the working relationship between officers and telecommunicators.

When CVPD began streaming 9-1-1 calls, officers and telecommunicators began working together and sharing information in ways never anticipated. Since officers

are now hearing 9-1-1 calls immediately, they began arriving on scenes before the telecommunicator had received the incoming call from the police call taker. CVPD immediately realized procedures were needed when a life-threatening call was received, and the officer had more information than the telecommunicator. The process would be no different than a patrol officer giving the telecommunicator information on an incident that was initiated in the field. The radio-telecommunicator creates a call-for-service (CFS) on the computer. Once the call for service is entered into the computer by the call taker the two separate incidents are combined. For the most part, daily duties and overall operations in the emergency communications center have not changed.

One example of how live-streaming 9-1-1 calls have changed officer response was during a recent 9-1-1 call to report a drowning. The caller was understandably hysterical and could not provide an address. Officers heard the 9-1-1 call and could see precisely where the caller was located and respond immediately. The officers arrived before the call had even been aired. What an incredible lifesaving technology that allows officers to arrive faster than ever before possible.

It did not take long after implementation for CVPD to realize the benefits of having the software in dispatch. The live-streaming technology is integrated with RapidSOS for immediate caller location during a 9-1-1 call. Officers and telecommunicators do not have to log into a web browser to enter a phone number for the caller location. Everything is instantaneous with accurate and immediate caller location visible on a map. The new mapping is superior to any other program and showed caller location and officer locations on the same map. Additionally, the data in the mapping system includes business and resident information, eliminating the need to search multiple databases. Dispatch supervisors can easily monitor all incoming 9-1-1 calls without tying up a phone line. Telecommunicators can also identify which officers are actively listening to a 9-1-1 call. This information allows telecommunicators the option to request officers to listen to an ongoing 9-1-1 call if it would aid the officer's response.

There is an increased focus on how data received by officers influence their response. Telecommunicators

are under constant pressure to get all the information from a caller, interpret the information accurately and input the data as quickly as possible. When responding to an emergency, every second matters. Agencies and telecommunicators are subject to tremendous liability. If a telecommunicator makes an error, it can have severe consequences. By live-streaming 9-1-1 calls, officers can now immediately ask to confirm and interpret incoming information. Whether it be a CAD error, human error or reporting party error, agencies can verify critical information. With the new level of check-and-balance, agencies can immediately identify training opportunities and correct mistakes.



Officers depend on telecommunicators to collect the most accurate information for a call-for-service. This data can mean the difference between life and death. A telecommunicator's words can have profound effects on the outcome of an officer's response. What a telecommunicator says can cause an officer to over-respond or under-respond to a call for service. Studies have shown that the relay of information by telecommunicators to officers can impact officer decisions.

An officer's initial understanding of a situation relies on the call taker entering the data and the telecommunicator airing the information. Live-streaming 9-1-1 calls allows the officer to have a direct account of the situation, thus, improving situational awareness. The officer can hear the live account of what is occurring directly from the caller. They hear the witness's perspective which can be different from receiving a synopsis entered by the

call taker, which is further edited to air on the primary radio to responding officers. Officers respond based on the eyewitness account instead of an interpretation of information. Officers now hear every detail which assists in developing a plan before arriving. The 9-1-1 technology helps the community with faster response times and helps the officer assess the situation based on a complete set of details.

It is extremely rare for a telecommunicator to work one incident at a time. A telecommunicator attempts to read updates on multiple active incidents and update responding officers. It is impossible to air the turn-by-turn of a drunk driver while also managing another critical incident at the same time. Officers can now hear live information of a suspect's location and movement immediately. Officers hear from the caller that the suspect may be fleeing, passing a responding officer or driving in the direction of the officer.

Live-streaming 9-1-1 technology is bridging the gap between dispatch and patrol. Officers, sergeants and watch commanders more often commend the telecommunicators on a job well done. The common realization is that patrol never comprehended how telecommunicators do their jobs. Officers previously asked numerous questions on the radio when responding to a call for service. There was a level of frustration that the telecommunicator may not be asking the right questions or airing appropriate information. Since the implementation of live-streaming 9-1-1 calls, officers perception of our telecommunicators has changed. The officers now know telecommunicators are asking the appropriate questions, because they can hear the interaction between the caller and call taker. The officers have a better understanding of the hard work telecommunicators do on every call ensuring their and the citizen's safety. The officers express an elevated level of respect, and even have a new sense of protectiveness towards the telecommunicators. CVPD is using the live-streaming technology to enhance telecommunicator training, update policies and procedures, and create an earlier intervention when issues are detected.

Our nation is asking law enforcement to do things differently. The national message is to increase transparency and accuracy in officer response.

Live-streaming 9-1-1 calls enhance both. It allows the officer to make the best-informed decision based on every detail provided. Police telecommunicators are a critical link in police response. Livestreaming 9-1-1 calls directly to officers has filled the missing link between the citizen, telecommunicator and officer.

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