

Nextel Dispatch Integration Keeps Iredell County Covered

Iredell County Emergency Communications, Operations and Management gains redundancy, security and coverage with Nextel Dispatch Integration

Challenge

Spanning over 570 square miles dominated by ridges, creeks and valleys, Iredell County, North Carolina had long posed a communications challenge for emergency personnel—traditional land mobile radios (LMR) that emergency response teams relied on for mission-critical communications would lose coverage in certain rural areas.

Iredell County Emergency Communications, Operations and Management (ECOM) fields all 911 calls for the county and its municipalities and dispatches nearly every service including Fire, Emergency Medical Services, Rescue and the Sheriff Departments. As the primary link between the public and emergency services organizations, last year ECOM dispatched over 80,000 incidents. With volume that high and on course to increase by nearly 15% this year, it became imperative that ECOM extend its communications systems to enhance reliability, security and coverage.

Solution

Iredell County ECOM determined it was time to upgrade its existing LMR system and at the same time enhance its overall communications infrastructure. ECOM learned that it could use Nextel Dispatch Integration to easily integrate Nextel handsets into its Orbacom TDM150 console and the LMR system for a completely interoperable solution. ECOM decided to seize the opportunity to create redundancy, fill coverage gaps, and provide more secure channels of communication than the existing LMR system could offer. Already, many of the personnel across the various public safety agencies were using Nextel handsets. Through a grant from the Department of Homeland Security, Iredell County ECOM purchased the Nextel solution.

Given the demand on their services, ECOM setup five communications consoles in order to field multiple calls simultaneously and is in the process of adding a sixth. Four channels are integrated into the consoles, with one designated for fire, one for medical, one for law enforcement, and one for operations which includes top officials across the emergency response teams such as the Chief of Police,



*With a team of 23 full-time and 15 part-time employees, **Iredell County Emergency Communications, Operations and Management (ECOM)** answers all 911 calls for the county and municipalities. ECOM is responsible for dispatching 23 Fire Departments, four Rescue Departments, four Emergency Medical Services Departments, the County's Sheriff's Department, Troutman Police Department and the County's Correctional Facility. Additionally, ECOM interacts with all local government service agencies and neighboring jurisdictions. The total number of calls for service received last year from its population of approximately 140,000 was more than 335,400. Nearly 95,000 were calls to 911 of which over 83,000 were dispatched to the county's emergency response teams.*

the EMS Director and the ECOM Director. Via Direct Connect and Group Connect emergency services personnel can communicate directly with each other. Cross-channel communications is also available as needed and, in the event of disaster, communication with federal, state and other local agencies can also be quickly integrated.

911 calls are dispatched through the LMR system and duplicate messages via text or voice are transmitted through the Nextel system. This redundancy assures communication despite dead zones or in the event that a radio tower goes down. And, as with the LMR system, all Nextel calls are recorded which is a key requirement for personnel safety and liability.

Bottom line

Over the past year and half since ECOM began using the Nextel solution, reliability, coverage and security have increased. Emergency response teams receive redundant dispatch messages ensuring communications regardless of possible outages.

As a result of the dedicated channel for operations, the Nextel system has streamlined communications between top personnel and ECOM. In addition, Nextel handsets are used as the primary communication device for administration, offloading non-emergency traffic from the LMR system. Taking advantage of the extra security Nextel handsets provide, particularly sensitive calls are transmitted exclusively via the Nextel system so that scanners cannot access the information. In the future ECOM is considering adding GPS data transmission for tracking emergency response teams and additional handsets for volunteer fire and rescue.

“Nextel Dispatch Integration is super. It was quick, easy and delivered everything we wanted. The interoperability has been seamless and the extra security, redundancy and coverage give us a level of confidence and assurance we never had before.”

*– David W. Martin, Director, Iredell County
Emergency Communications, Operations
& Management*