

# ***Cumberland County 9-1-1 Feasibility Study***

## **Executive Summary**

Beginning in November 2010, V-COMM, a private telecommunications engineering and governmental consulting firm, conducted a study to determine if a Public Safety Answering Dispatch Point (PSADP) consolidation would be feasible for Cumberland County. In order to conduct the study, surveys were distributed and site visits were made to the existing PSADP agencies in Cumberland County; Bridgeton Police, Millville Police, Vineland Police, and the Cumberland County 9-1-1 Center. The results of this study were released during a presentation V-COMM made to the Cumberland County Board of Chosen Freeholders in May 2011. It was V-COMM's recommendation that, "Cumberland County consider a phased consolidation of all PSADP functions within the County into one single consolidated PSADP. We investigated the existing County Dispatch facility located on Bridgeton Avenue and have determined this is the best location within the County for this consolidated PSADP."

While many different factors and scenarios were considered during the study, the primary elements that led V-COMM to their final recommendation included:

1. Financial impacts of future national and statewide Next Generation (NG) 9-1-1 requirements
2. Senate Bill 45 (S-45) which addresses the consolidation of PSADP's
3. Current "inefficiencies" in the Cumberland County 9-1-1 system
4. Lack of future funding for PSADP's that are not part of a consolidation collective effort
5. Overall savings for County residents resulting in the reduction of PSADP facilities and equipment from four to one

## **Financial Impacts of NG 9-1-1**

While there has been much discussion over the last few years regarding NG 9-1-1, no final mandates have been released by any of the 9-1-1 governing bodies. Even without completed standards, it is virtually certain that the current equipment at all PSADP will require significant upgrades/replacements. Vineland has been aware of these forthcoming directives and has participated in some of the working groups that will shape the final standards. Funding to enhance existing systems is a scenario that is common in the telecommunication and technology industry. The City of Vineland has funded these endeavors in the past, and will continue to do so in the future with as little burden to its citizens as possible.

## Senate Bill 45 (S-45)

This Senate Bill, which has not yet been passed, includes three main elements:

1. It calls for the "consolidation of PSADP's as appropriate and the allocation of moneys dedicated for the operation of PSADP's on the merging and sharing of PSADP functions by municipalities, counties, and the State police".
2. The Bill may establish "a 9-1-1 call volume minimum that may be used as a factor in determining which PSADP functions are to be consolidated."
3. Requires limiting the use of sworn law enforcement officers to provide dispatch services.

Vineland's PSADP has been on the forefront of sharing information for quite some time. In 2009 we began a law enforcement information sharing initiative called New Jersey Data Exchange (NJ-DEx). NJ-DEx is a statewide database of case investigations, offender information, suspect vehicles, etc. The NJ State Police (NJSP) spear-headed the project and their goal was to have 21 connections for each of the participating counties. As a technology progressive agency, we had the ability to make our own NJ-DEx connection which was approved by the NJSP. This "separate" connection did not result in any additional fees that a County connection would not have seen. In 2010 we "went live" with the system and began contributing our own local data to the state-wide database. The result has been a benefit for not only our department, but all of the other agencies participating in the system. Currently, we are exploring another information sharing project with Camden City and Gloucester County to share information captured by our Automatic License Plate Reader (ALPR) systems.

Vineland's PSADP is not only the busiest in Cumberland County, but our annual crime rates are some of the highest in the state per capita. As a result of our high crime and calls-for-service rates, Vineland has been designated as one of the "Urban 15". The "Urban 15" designation includes fifteen economically depressed municipalities throughout the state with the highest crime rates per population. Other cities include Trenton, Newark, the Oranges, and Camden. The 9-1-1 and administrative phone calls handled by our center would easily surpass any call volume minimum established by this Bill.

Vineland has a long standing policy in place that limits the use of sworn officers to staff our PSADP. Only in emergency situations, or as a light duty status assignment, are officers used in the Communications Center. Unlike some of the other PSADP in the area, Telecommunicators function *only* as call takers and dispatchers (including NCIC and warrant tasks) and handle no other administrative duties within the department. The very location of the PSADP is out of public view so concentration can be on day-to-day telecommunicator tasks.

## Current 9-1-1 System "Inefficiencies"

During the County Freeholder presentation and in the final consolidation study document, several references were made to "9-1-1 system inefficiencies" within Cumberland County. This is caused mainly by the abnormally high rate of calls that must be transferred and routed to the



correct agency based on the requested response. This was summarized in the V-COMM study as follows, "The County 9-1-1 Communications Center answers 100% of the wireless 9-1-1 calls in Cumberland County and all of the landline based 9-1-1 calls with the only exception being those originating in Vineland; which are routed to the Vineland PSADP. The County Communications Center is also responsible for the dispatching of all Fire Departments throughout Cumberland County (27 stations), nine (9) EMS squads (BLS), and countywide ALS Services. The County Communications Center is currently configuring for the dispatching of the County Sheriff's Department in 2011. Inbound 9-1-1 calls requiring other services to be dispatched are transferred to other PSADPs as follows:

- Calls requiring Bridgeton Police Department to be dispatched to the Bridgeton PSADP.
- Calls requiring Millville Police Department to be dispatched to the Millville PSADP.
- All wireless 9-1-1 calls that require either Vineland Police Department or Vineland EMS (BLS only) to be dispatched are transferred to the Vineland PSADP.
- All 9-1-1 calls that require Police dispatch in areas beyond the reaches of the Vineland, Millville, and Bridgeton Police Departments are transferred to the New Jersey State Police as the appropriate agency having Police jurisdiction within Cumberland County outside of Bridgeton, Millville, and Vineland.

Based on this breakdown, the system "inefficiencies" are easy to see. While Vineland's PSADP receives all of the land-line 9-1-1 calls originating from within our jurisdiction, wireless 9-1-1 calls are routed to the Cumberland County 9-1-1 Center. This was originally a technology limitation with equipment from the NJ State Office of Emergency Telecommunications (OETS) that only allowed wireless calls to be routed to one PSADP per county. However, as technology has advanced over the years, OETS now has the ability to quickly and easily route both Phase I (cell tower location information only) and Phase II (full GPS cell phone location information) wireless calls to the geographically correct PSADP. The direct routing of these emergency calls-for-service significantly reduces call processing time, dispatch time, and ultimately response time. Wireless emergency call direct routing can be accomplished immediately with no additional personnel required and at no additional cost to the PSADP or the community.

A meeting was held in 2010 with representatives from Vineland's PSADP, Cumberland County's PSADP, and NJ OETS to discuss the re-routing of Vineland's wireless calls to the Vineland PSADP. While the State agrees that it would be in the best interest of the community due to the decreased call processing time, they do not routinely become involved in such "territorial issues". In the end, the Cumberland County PSADP refused to "relinquish" wireless calls originating from Vineland, and as of this date, those calls are still answered by the Cumberland County PSADP and transferred out on a daily basis.

### **Lack of Future Funding**

According to the consolidation study, "NG 9-1-1 upgrades via the State (grants) will only be issued to one PSADP per County (with some major metro area exceptions)". It goes on to say, "Under the S-45 legislation and the NJ State 9-1-1 commission plans, all grant monies are to be directed to those counties consolidated, or working towards consolidation". This is not entirely true. As an "Urban 15" designated city, Vineland would be considered as one of the "major



metro area exceptions". When the NJ State 9-1-1 grant programs were in effect, application for the grant funds were limited only to consolidated PSADP's serving a population greater than 65,000, *except* for the "Urban 15" agencies. All fifteen of those agencies and PSADP's were eligible (and received) funding, including Vineland. That same designation also recently provided for a NJ Law Enforcement Technology (LET) grant in the amount of \$250,000.00. This was specifically for funding force-multiplying technology purchases. Conversations that we have had with various State offices expect that similar funding will be available for future 9-1-1 purchases related to NG 9-1-1 for the "Urban 15" designated jurisdictions.

### Overall Savings for County Residents

In the study, and in the presentation to the Board of Freeholders, bottom line savings were shown if Vineland's PSADP participated in the complete consolidation of county agencies. With Vineland's participation, a savings of \$1,822,703 was projected. This figure was determined by two main reductions. The first was an "estimated" reduction of equipment and maintenance by 50%. This figure is ambitious, but not realistic. Even without an agency PSADP, Vineland would need to use and maintain many of the systems and databases that are in place today. Our Records Management System (RMS), mobile field reporting, warrant database, and mobile messaging are just some examples of systems that would be required regardless of the agency that performed the actual dispatching function.

The second, and most significant, savings came from the total elimination of all of our existing 18 personnel. This is not a realistic scenario by any means. The study showed consistently that administrative calls, both emergent and non-emergent, far outweighed the 9-1-1 calls for every agency in the County. Staff would still be required to answer these large numbers of administrative calls from the public, officers, other agencies, vendors, etc. One of the potential solutions to answering these calls has been the suggestion of "Safe Haven" call boxes located in the police agencies. This is not consistent with the Vineland Police Department's mission statement or goals for community service. Personnel should, and will, be staffed to answer and respond to these incoming administrative calls. While all 18 may not be required, the total elimination of all positions is also not practical and any savings realized by such a reduction is flawed.

While the overall savings for total consolidation was shown, the individual cost breakdown was not shared during the Freeholder presentation. The following tables were taken directly from the V-COMM consolidation study (page 30):

PSADP	TOTAL EMPLOYEE SALARY	EMPLOYEE COST/CALL	TOTAL EMPL COST/ 9-1-1 CALL
Cumb County Comm	\$1,655,750.00	\$21.00	\$21.00
Vineland Police	\$975,612.55	\$4.08	\$42.84
Millville Police	\$448,243.34	\$11.39	\$69.77
Bridgeton Police	\$360,000.00	\$7.98	\$79.38

PSADP	TOTAL EQUIP/MAINT COSTS	EQUIP/MAINT COST/CALL (TOTAL)	EQUIP/MAINT COST/9-1-1 CALL
Cumb County Comm	\$98,704.00	\$1.25	\$1.25
Vineland Police	\$28,280.00	\$0.12	\$1.24
Millville Police	\$45,387.84	\$1.15	\$7.06
Bridgeton Police	\$20,000.00	\$0.44	\$4.41

These cost breakdowns clearly show that Vineland's PSADP has some of the lowest salary and equipment/maintenance costs throughout the County, thereby making it the most cost efficient PSADP in the study. This is a direct result of the volume of calls, both emergent and administrative, that are handled and processed on a yearly basis.

### Informational Gaps

Since there was no opportunity during the Freeholder presentation provided to ask questions of our own, there are several informational gaps that need to be addressed. The study was forthcoming with a proposed consolidation "Budget Estimate" for the project. This budget included the following:

- County 9-1-1 Center building electrical service upgrade= \$435,500
- County 9-1-1 Center building structural upgrade= \$130,000
- Capital Expenditures= \$1,608,000
- Transitional Operational Expenditures= \$149,500
- Ongoing Operational Expenditures (yearly)= \$3,208,574

How will these funds be obtained? Will the ongoing operational expenditures be split evenly between the participating agencies? Based on the results of the study, we can presume that instead of an even division, that agencies would contribute funds based on call volume and calls-for-service. If that's the case, we would be paying a significant share since our agency would generate the majority of this work. What about future costs? Will these costs also be distributed based on call volume or another Functional Time Equivalent (FTE) metric? If this is the case, then wouldn't the consolidation only serve to merge the current agencies just to re-distribute costs throughout the rest of the County? When these costs are re-distributed, the individual agencies will have limited input with regards to equipment and staffing in the future.

Specifically addressing the issue staffing, the study recognized that the increase in line staff (40 full-time call-takers/dispatchers are proposed) needed to adequately handle the consolidated call volume, would require additional supervisors. These supervisor salaries would be at a higher rate and would be positions above and beyond the existing staffing proposals. It should be noted that Vineland's PSADP does not include salary for supervisory personnel and instead relies on existing department supervisors to fill the role, thereby reducing overall staffing and personnel costs.



## 2006 NJ Consolidation Study

In 2006 an independent statewide 9-1-1 Consolidation Study was performed by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development. Overall, the study found that 9-1-1 center consolidation was beneficial in the right environment. Among the findings they said:

- “While reducing the number of PSADP’s would probably cut the number of phone voice circuits needed to be maintained by the state and thus lead to a savings, this would generate a limited cost savings to the affected agencies.”
- “No Communications Center should be eligible to receive enhanced 9-1-1 grants unless it can demonstrate that it is staffed by a minimum of two certified Telecommunicators dedicated to call-taking/dispatching 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. This recommendation reflects what is needed to ensure public safety and quality of service.”
  - Vineland’s PSADP either meets or exceeds this minimum at all times.
- “The cost analysis conducted by the study found that the smallest PSADP’s were likely to be inefficient, compared with all PSADP’s.”
  - The cost analysis conducted by V-COMM shows that Vineland’s PSADP is one of the busiest and most cost efficient in the County. This is based on ALI dip calls and total calls received by the agency.
- Some other nationwide recommended considerations for consolidation include PSADP’s answering fewer than 10 calls per day (Maine), PSADP’s receiving at least 300 calls per month (California), or towns with a population of 40,000 or less (Connecticut).
  - According to V-COMM’s study, Vineland’s PSADP meets or exceeds all of these metrics and therefore by those standards, would not benefit long-term from consolidation.

In summary, the study found the greatest benefits to consolidation would be realized from smaller PSADP’s with low call volumes and few staff combining services into larger agencies. These metrics do not describe the Vineland PSADP in any way. The Heldrich Center study also said, “Based on information from interviews and site visits, it is important to understand that anticipated cost savings alone are insufficient motivation to pursue consolidation. Rather, consolidation should also be driven by local officials’ interest in improved service and maintaining high standards of public safety”. These high standards of public safety are not just met, but surpassed every day by the Vineland PSADP. We agree that improved service could be realized from the proper routing of wireless 9-1-1 calls to the correct agency. Both of these can be accomplished immediately without the unnecessary capital costs associated with consolidation efforts.