



ERNEST A. ALMONTE, CPA, CFE
AUDITOR GENERAL
EALMONTE@OAG.STATE.RI.US

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND - GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OFFICE of the AUDITOR GENERAL

AUDIT SUMMARY

INTEGRITY ♦ RELIABILITY ♦ INDEPENDENCE ♦ ACCOUNTABILITY

JUNE 2001

UNIFORM EMERGENCY TELEPHONE SYSTEM – E-911

PERFORMANCE AUDIT JUNE 2001

We completed a performance audit of the Uniform Emergency Telephone System – E-911. The objective of our audit was to determine whether the program is being administered efficiently and effectively and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Our audit was conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* and covered the fiscal year ended June 30, 2000 and fiscal 2001 through April 30, 2001.

The E-911 system provides twenty-four hour statewide emergency public safety communications services from one answering point through the universal emergency telephone number 9-1-1. E-911 telecommunicators process police, fire and rescue calls originating within the State. The system automatically pinpoints the exact location of the caller when the call originates from a wireline telephone. The E-911 program has 47 employees, including 35 telecommunicators and 7 supervisors at the public safety answering point in North Providence.

Each telephone common carrier and telecommunication service provider collects a monthly surcharge from each subscriber and remits the revenue to the State. The surcharge is general revenue of the State and operations of the E-911 program are supported by annual appropriations.

Annual operating expenditures total approximately \$3.2 million.

Revenues collected from telephone subscribers in the State total over \$5 million annually, but no audits are conducted to verify the amounts of surcharge revenue collected by each service provider. Recently adopted rules and regulations of the E-911 system allow for independent audits of surcharge revenue. Given the amount of revenue collected and the likelihood that these revenues will continue to increase as a result of the growth in wireless telephones, the E-911 system should provide for annual independent audits of surcharge revenues.

Wireless telephone carriers are under a mandate from the Federal Communications Commission to

upgrade the enhanced service in two phases. With the exception of one telephone carrier, Phase I has been accomplished in Rhode Island. The E-911 agency is now seeking funding to implement Phase II. This will permit the system to identify the location of wireless callers by using geographical information system coordinates and other data. The estimated cost to implement Phase II for E-911 is approximately \$4 million. This could be met by appropriating additional amounts on a short-term basis from the excess funds generated by the monthly surcharge.

The E-911 system's primary public safety answering point is located in North Providence. Alternate sites have been established at State Police headquarters in Scituate and at the primary service provider in Providence. Neither of these sites offers the level of service

Audit Highlights

- The E-911 system should provide for annual independent audits of surcharge revenues which will approximate \$5.1 million in fiscal 2001.
- Additional amounts could be appropriated, on a short-term basis, from the excess funds generated by the monthly surcharge to upgrade the system to allow better identification of the location of wireless callers.
- Neither of the alternate public safety answering points offers the level of service available at the primary location.
- Staff assignments by shift did not always correlate to call volume. Management should utilize available data to ensure that shift scheduling is at optimal levels.

911 is studying the need for a redundant site which would function as an alternate answering point; if a new site is located with sufficient room for expansion, the current site (which is now using all its available space) could become an alternate location.

The E-911 system operates three shifts daily, utilizing 35 telecommunicators and 7 supervisors. Staff assignments do not correlate to call volume: the first shift uses 29% of the available staff, but receives only 16% of the call volume. Conversely, the second and third shifts use 71% of the staff but receive 84% of the call volume. Management informed us that the type of calls received on each shift also influences scheduling. We believe management should utilize available data to ensure that shift scheduling is at optimal levels.

E-911 personnel have access to confidential and personal information regarding caller's name and addresses and individual situations. Although employees agree to criminal background checks as a condition of employment, we found that only 45% of the personnel files contained a record of a criminal background check.

Other recommendations in our report address documentation of consultant expenses, performance evaluations, and payroll documentation.

Copies of this report can be obtained by calling 222-2435 or by visiting our website at www.oag.state.ri.us.