

Metro Communications Agency 2008 Annual Report



Letter from the Director

In 2008, Metro Communications underwent its largest reorganization in the agency's 28 year history. A joint agreement between the City of Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County established Metro Communications as a stand alone agency governed by a joint board consisting of two county commissioners, two city councilmen, and the Mayor of Sioux Falls as the Chairman.

In addition to becoming a separate entity from the county and city, several changes occurred in staffing at the agency. This year marked the first year communications operators and other non-management employees were members of a labor union, AFSCME. This year also added a management position to the agency, Business Manager.

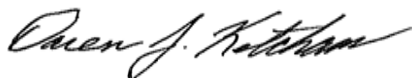
Metro Communications continues to operate at a high operations tempo. In 2008 Metro Communications received nearly 285,000 calls. Of these calls approximately 85,000 were emergency 911 calls and 97% were answered within three rings of the telephone. Call center staff exceeded emergency medical dispatch standards and exceeded national averages of other accredited centers.

Other accomplishments in 2008 include: advancements in paging procedures were identified and tested; additional users were added to the digital radio system; and operating under our adopted budget and adding funds to our reserve account.

The 2008 Metro Communications Agency Annual Report provides a summary of the agency's overall operations. The report's four main areas are Operations, Quality Assurance, Finance & Administration, and 2009 Goals.

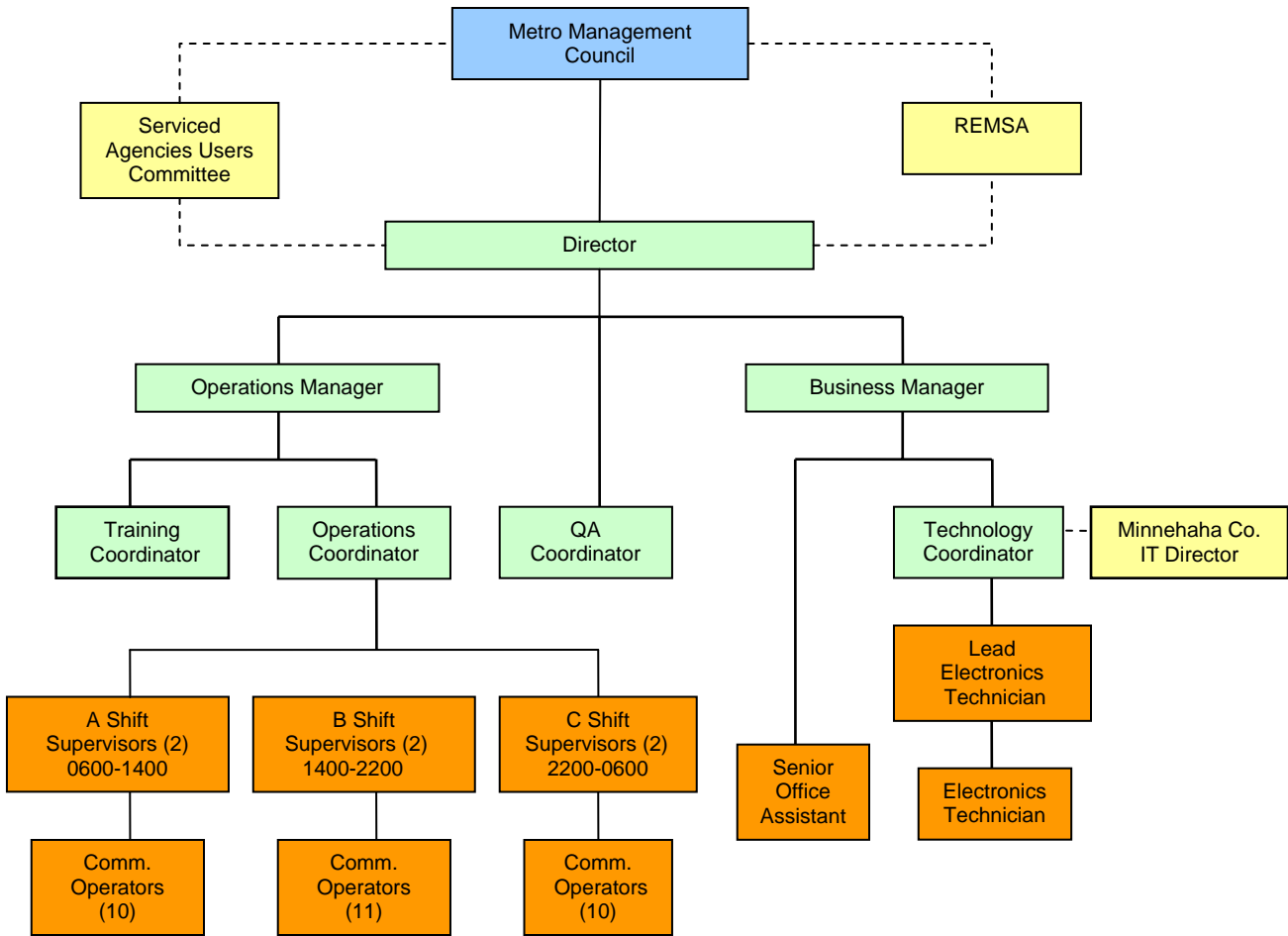
This year has been an exciting year at Metro and the staff is looking forward to 2009. They have identified several goals for the agency. Through their hard work and dedication I have no doubt they will accomplish every one of them. The staff at Metro Communications is a talented group of professionals and some of the finest I have had the pleasure to work with in public safety. Together with our stakeholders, Metro Communications will make Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County a better place to live, work, visit, and raise a family.

Sincerely,



Daren J. Ketcham
Director

Organizational Chart



Effective January 12, 2009 (47 authorized staff)

- Blue: Oversight Authority
- Green: Non-Bargaining Unit Staff
- Orange: Bargaining Unit Staff
- Yellow: Coordinating Agencies

Operations

The Operations Division of Metro Communications Agency exists to serve the public and public safety agencies in Minnehaha County and the City of Sioux Falls by answering emergency and non-emergency calls, dispatching emergency responders, and insuring public and officer safety. The division includes the Operations Manager, Operations Coordinator, Training Coordinator and the following dispatch staff: 6 Shift Supervisors and 31 Communications Operators.

Agencies Served

We are a 24 hour operation serving approximately 174,000 residents in Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County. The agency provides service to:

Sioux Falls PD	SF Fire Rescue
Minnehaha County SO	Baltic FD
Brandon PD	Brandon FD
Rural Metro Ambulance	Colton FD
Dell Rapids Ambulance	Crooks FD
Garretson Ambulance	Dell Rapids FD
Humboldt Ambulance	Garretson FD
Medstar Ambulance	Hartford FD
SF Animal Control	Humboldt FD
Humane Society	Lyons FD
Second Chance Rescue	Renner FD
Minnehaha County Emergency Management	Sherman FD
Jasper, MN FD	Splitrock FD
Jasper, MN Ambulance	Valley Springs FD
	SD Air Guard Fire

Statistics

Metro operators answered 284,226 phone calls in 2008. Of these calls, 97.79% were answered within three rings of the call being initiated. These phone calls resulted in 72,090 outgoing calls and the dispatch of 134,667 incidents to the various law enforcement, fire, ambulance and animal control agencies. Operators also entered 175,822 Calls for Service (CFS). A CFS may include traffic stops, warrant service, civil paper service, broadcasts for reckless drivers, driving while intoxicated and other dispatches that do not require an incident number.

TELEPHONE CALLS RECEIVED PER SHIFT				
	A Shift	B Shift	C Shift	Total
911	28,405	38,163	19,722	86,290
Non-Emergency	70,072	83,035	38,705	191,812
911 Hang-ups	2,115	2,889	1,120	6,124
Total	100,592	124,087	59,547	284,226

Operations (Cont.)

TOTAL INCIDENTS AND CALLS FOR SERVICE PER SHIFT				
	A Shift	B Shift	C shift	Total
Incident Numbers	45,313	59,115	30,239	134,667
Calls for Service	58,602	78,419	38,801	175,822

INCIDENTS				
Agency	2007	% Total Incidents	2008	% Total Incidents
Total Law Enforcement	96,157	73.68%	98,846	73.400%
Total Fire	10,857	8.320%	11,429	8.490%
Total Ambulance	10,128	7.83%	11,045	8.20%
Emergency Management	292	0.224%	294	0.218%
Animal Control/Second Chance	12,976	9.94%	13,053	9.69%
Totals	130,500	100.00%	134,667	100.00%

CALLS FOR SERVICE				
Agency	2007	% Total CFS	2008	% Total CFS
Total Law Enforcement	133,921	79.59%	133,573	78.85%
Total Fire	10,857	6.45%	11,429	6.75%
Total Ambulance	10,218	6.07%	11,045	6.52%
Emergency Management	292	0.17%	294	0.17%
Animal Control/Second Chance	12,976	7.71%	13,053	7.71%
Totals	168,264	100%	169,394	100%

Command Posts, Tactical Dispatch and Citizens Academy

This year, dispatchers again staffed the command posts at the Sioux Empire Fair and the Life-Light Festival. Dispatchers also staffed the Communications Unit of the command post during a high profile Hell's Angel court trial November 3rd – November 18th.

In 2008, the Tactical Dispatch Team (TDT) responded with the SFPD SWAT team to nine call outs for reports of armed, barricaded and/or suicidal subjects, and four high risk warrants. The TDT continues to train with the SWAT team six times a year.

In addition, Metro Communications Agency hosted two 911 Citizen Academies in 2008. These Academies provided education to approximately 60 citizens, and there continues to be an active waiting list for future sessions.

Operations (Cont.)

Recruitment

In 2008, we added 10 full-time dispatchers to our staff: Michael Eggert, Jinny Tran, Melanie Whirlwind Horse, Jon Dorsman, Justin Faber, Amanda Frazier, Kara Jones, MaryAnn McCarty, Greg Olson, and David Roe.

Dispatcher Training

Dispatchers are essential in the public safety profession. They are the first to answer a call for help and the link to getting an appropriate response dispatched in as little time as possible. In many cases of medical emergencies and domestic disputes the dispatcher is the 1st “first-responder” and in all cases of public safety, the dispatcher is the lifeline to field personnel. Due to the important role this profession sustains, Metro Communications continues to provide extensive training to new dispatchers and continued education for all its employees.

Overall, new employees spend 1,024 hours in training. This roughly equates to completing 25 weeks in the training program before they are allowed to work independently in the 9-1-1 Center. During their time in training, recruits rotate between the classroom and dispatch center to fully capitalize on the skills required to perform competently as a dispatcher. Recruits spend two weeks in classroom and simulator training at the State Certification Center in Pierre. Classroom instruction at the Agency is delivered by the Training Coordinator, while training in the center is conducted by the seven Certified Training Officers. The Training Officers monitor all transmissions and phone calls handled by the recruit until they have successfully completed the program.

Continued education was provided to all dispatch employees on a weekly basis and also 6 times a year through in-service training. This training emphasizes topics relevant to the dispatcher’s daily responsibilities to help them stay sharp and maintain their efficiency in their ever changing profession (i.e. terrorist hits, Onstar training, CapTel phones, and the 24/7 program).

General Staff Training

It is the goal of the Agency to provide relevant training opportunities to assist all staff in growing professionally in their roles at Metro. These opportunities include conference and industry specific classes, along with City provided training. Supervisor meetings and in-services are also utilized for training.

Staff attended a variety of training in 2008, including: Ergonomics in the workplace, Supervisor Training, Advanced Supervision, Bridging Generations, Self-Management, FMLA, and Situational Leadership.

Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance Coordinator of Metro Communications Agency is responsible for the review of medical calls to ensure compliance with protocol and continued accreditation as an Accredited Center of Excellence (ACE) by the National Academy of Emergency Dispatch. Our goal is to strive for continued improvement in the various areas of compliance and provide the best possible medical care to the patient, making our dispatchers true first responders.

Accreditation

Our Agency was first accredited in 2000. We are one of two ACEs in the State of South Dakota, and the 45th of 88 current ACEs worldwide. We continue to surpass ACE averages and compliance standards established by the Academy.

	Case Entry	Key Questions	Pre-Arrival Instructions	Post-Dispatch Instructions	Chief Complaint	Code	Total
Metro Communications	98.72%	98.98%	99.18%	99.08%	98.63%	98.66%	98.82%
All ACE Averages	97.24%	97.85%	95.25%	97.18%	97.83%	97.71%	97.36%
Compliance Standards	95.00%	90.00%	95.00%	90.00%	95.00%	90.00%	90.00%

Call Reviews

Medical calls are reviewed for compliance to protocol, using guidelines and performance indicators established by Priority Dispatch and the National Academy of Emergency Dispatch. The Agency also uses reviews for positive feedback and identification of appropriate training.

Reviews are either random or special. Random reviews are comprised of a preset list of randomly selected calls. Special reviews are completed for high priority transport and/or life situations (such as cardiac arrest, choking, and child birth), as well as reviews for training purposes. The Agency reviewed 1,902 of the 10,994 medical calls answered in 2008.

In 2008, three dispatchers were recognized for maintaining 100% compliance in all categories of call reviews for 12 straight months: Jeannie Nyhus, Anna Flogstad, and Janet Sternhagen.

Training

Each of our dispatchers are required to be Advanced Emergency Medical Dispatchers (EMD).

Recruits complete a three day EMD course, advanced call scenario training, and training discs in order to receive this certification. Four recruits completed this certification in 2008.

The Academy requires every Advanced EMD to complete 24 hours of continuing education every two years to maintain this certification. Training includes in-services, journal articles, training discs, and scenarios. 100% of our affected dispatchers were recertified in 2008.

Finance & Administration

The Finance and Administration Division of Metro Communications Agency serves to sustain the fiscal health of the agency, meet the human resource needs of our staff, and ensure that our technologies are effective tools for our staff and the responders throughout the county who depend upon them. The division includes the Business Manager, Senior Office Assistant, Technology Coordinator, Lead Electronics Technician and Electronics Technician.

A Year of Transition

Finance and Administration took on a new meaning for Metro Communications Agency in 2008. Along with the independence of the Agency came greater responsibility for accounting and human resources.

Previously a department of Minnehaha County, the independent Metro Communications Agency was created effective January 1, 2008 under a joint cooperative agreement between the City of Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County.

In 2007, Agency administrative staff worked with Minnehaha County and the City of Sioux Falls to develop policies and procedures, and affect a smooth transition to our independence. This team transitioned accounting and human resource services from Minnehaha County, and later the City of Sioux Falls, to the Agency during 2008.

Existing staff took on additional responsibilities and a new position was added to effectively handle the finance and human resource responsibilities as an independent agency.

Staffing & Human Resources

All staff became employees of the Metro Communications Agency on January 1, 2008.

Staff organized, and AFSCME Local 2561-A (later identified as 3516) was created. A two-year contract was signed, and non-management Metro staff became union members on January 1, 2008.

Insurance providers were identified and employee benefits were approved to provide staff with benefits consistent with those they received while County employees.

The Agency had an authorized strength of 46 staff in 2008: Director, Assistant Director, Business Manager, CAD Manager, Training Supervisor, QA Manager, Senior Office Assistant, 3 Shift Supervisors, 3 Assistant Shift Supervisors, 7 Advanced Communications Operators, 24 Communications Operators, Lead Electronics Technician and an Electronics Technician.

Finance & Admin (Cont.)

Budget & Finance

The Agency's budget for 2008 was \$3.655 million and was funded in great part by E911 surcharges. 2008 budgeted revenues were \$2.05 million. Current projections are for an annual increase of 3% for these revenues. This increase results solely from growth as the surcharge is a level \$.75 per telephone line per month.

The next largest source of funding for the Agency is the support from the City of Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County. In 2008 their budgeted support was \$1.44 million. The City's share is 75% while the County's share is 25%. Agency budgets take into account 5 year budget projections and capital improvement plans in order to build necessary cash reserves and minimize spikes in City & County share needed for cash flow and capital improvements.

The balance of the Agency's budget is funded by Radio Shop and Audio Request service receipts, interest income and other miscellaneous funding sources.

Radio Shop parts and services revenue totaled approximately \$57,000 in 2008. This was a substantial increase from approximately \$34,000 in 2007 and was due to a change in the billing practices of the shop. This increase in revenues reduced the City and County support needed to fund the operations from approximately \$100,000 in 2007 to approximately \$74,000 in 2008. The continued rent-free use of a County building further reduces the funds needed to sustain these operations.

Revenue from Audio Request fees was approximately \$3,800. 2008 was the first year the Agency charged fees to provide recorded copies of 911 calls. Recordings were provided to 24 different agencies. The States Attorney, City Police and County Sheriff purchased software to access our system directly and therefore do not generally pay fees for recordings.

Increased revenues and careful spending in 2008 resulted in a year-end fund balance of approximately \$870,000 which added in excess of \$400,000 to anticipated reserves.

The Agency's five-year capital improvement plan includes replacement of the current E911 phone system in 2013, with a projected cost of \$800,000. The addition to cash in 2008 will minimize increases in City & County support in contemplation of this significant purchase, and/or possibly allow for a more timely replacement.

Finance & Admin (Cont.)

Technology

New World Systems is the company that provides our public safety software. There are multiple modules of this software that are used by all public safety agencies in Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County. Metro Communications uses three of the modules. Our primary module is the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system; we also utilize the Law Enforcement Records and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) modules.

The agency benefited from two major upgrades to the New World System in 2008. First, there was a major change in the way the mapping software worked within New World. Our mapping software is now using the latest in mapping technology by using the same software that both City and County GIS departments use for creating maps. Our old mapping software did a lot of work behind the scenes for our dispatchers, such as recommending which units to dispatch and verifying whether or not an address was valid to an address range.

The new software gives us additional features that will be beneficial to both dispatchers and responders in the field. Some of the new features include fly over pictures which the City and County have taken, the ability to create hyperlinks to instantly access all the information about an address that the GIS departments have stored in the system, and more accurate address verification. Because of the upgrade we now have the ability to verify to an address point layer, which gives us better control in making sure the correct responders are dispatched. This upgrade made it easier for City and County GIS departments to integrate maps with the Agency.

The second upgrade provides the capability to send alpha-numeric pages to multiple devices such as pagers, email and cell phone text messages. Previously we were only able to send these types of pages out to analog voice pagers. In addition, there were several changes to the call screens within CAD, providing more information to dispatchers and responders.

We improved paging to rural fire and ambulance responders in 2008 by moving our paging transmitter from the Prairie Winds tower site, located by Great Bear, to the Minnehaha County rural water tower near Corson. This eliminated interference that was occurring between the analog paging repeater and the state digital radio system which were both located on the Prairie Winds site. Because of the interference several agencies on the southeast side of the county experienced problems receiving pages when the digital radio system was being used simultaneously with the analog paging system. Moving the paging transmitter resolved this issue.

We worked with County Information Technology in 2008 to develop and implement a capital assets replacement plan for the Agency. All technological assets will be replaced on a revolving basis. This will ensure the equipment used by our dispatchers, and the responders who depend on them, are as up to date as possible.

Finance & Admin (Cont.)

Radio Shop

The Radio Shop is located on the Minnehaha County Highway campus on 60th Street North (bldg 3), just east of Cliff Avenue in Sioux Falls.

Radio Shop staff includes two technicians who work on public safety equipment for local government agencies and some federal agencies who don't have a local radio shop. Most of the work involves installation and maintenance of two-way radios, pagers, mobile computers, emergency lighting and siren controls. We also work with state radio on various projects involving our users and the state radio system.

Parts and services were provided to 26 different agencies in 2008. The significant users of these services were Sioux Falls Police, Fire & Rescue, Streets, and Transit System. Some of our larger projects in 2008 included: installing digital radios in all of the Sioux Falls Transit vehicles to get them on the state radio system; Outfitting new patrol cars for Brandon Police Department; Outfitting several vehicles for the U.S. Marshall's Service; and Outfitting Moody County Sheriff patrol cars with mobile computers and the Arbitrator camera system. We also finished installation of digital radios in all Sioux Falls utility vehicles, and outfitted their leased road graders with digital radios for the winter.

Training remains a priority in order to maintain our standards of excellence in-service for our users.

In prior years, a minimal flat fee was charged for services provided to local agencies, immaterial of the length of time required to perform the service. Other agencies were charged an hourly rate but it was well below the actual cost to provide the service. In 2008, the Agency established and implemented a standardized hourly travel & labor rate based on actual costs. While the Radio Shop is not self-sustaining, these new billing practices reduced the portion of City and County support needed to sustain our operations.

2009 Goals

Operations

- Increase the functionality of the call taking consoles by adding radio capabilities
- Retain 90% of the agency's current staffing levels
- Increase training opportunities for employees
- Continue to provide public education and recruitment opportunities by instructing two 911 Citizen Academies per year
- Maintain standard of 97.79% of answering 911 calls within three rings
- Continue to maintain an excellent relationship with all public safety agencies, and provide the best standard of care to the public

Quality Assurance

- Complete Reaccreditation process for EMD
- Implement version 12 of the medical protocol
- Continue to exceed protocol standards
- Achieve EMD-Q certification by all Coordinators

Finance & Administration

- Renew benefit contracts with minimal premium increases for 2010
- Operate within adopted budget
- Replace dispatch consoles (in our primary dispatch room) with ergonomically correct equipment
- Configure our phone system to utilize the capability to send alpha-numeric pages to multiple devices
- Eliminate use of analog voice paging for dispatching rural fire and ambulance services
- Acquire grant dollars for the purchase of radio positions for 2007 console purchases
- Replace existing digital radios at our backup center with more reliable radios
- Change address verification from the street center line version to the address point layer
- Relocate State Pen digital radio system site for transmitting/receiving radio traffic
- Pursue addition of 2 receive-only sites in Sioux Falls, one on the northwest side of town and one on the southeast side of town