

Vehicle Enhances Emergency Response

By Michele Coppola

A specially designed vehicle used as a mobile command and control center is providing a Nevada sheriff's office and the surrounding region with vital communications and intelligence gathering ability at the scene of an emergency.

The Washoe County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) Critical Incident Response Vehicle acts as a mobile analytics and intelligence gathering center, transporting communications equipment and staff from the WCSO's Regional Analysis Center to the field to coordinate emergency response.

"We have a regionwide approach to crimes and incidents that happen," explains Lt. Eric Spratley, who was involved in planning the vehicle along with intelligence gathering analysts from WCSO. "Our sheriff had the idea to take the center out to the scene of a critical incident so we could quickly have analysts at the scene along with the first responders. It could be a biological or terrorist incident, a crime, a natural disaster or a fire."

From the scene, analysts can more effectively coordinate with first responders, analyze data and exchange critical information among agencies.

The vehicle, unveiled in 2012, was developed with grants totaling \$573,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. WCSO Sgt. Michelle Bello discussed the vehicle at the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Fall 2012 Technology Institute for Law Enforcement.

The vehicle includes the following features:

- Workstations for four analysts in the rear of the vehicle. Analysts have access to a variety of analytical and crime programs such as ArcGIS.
- Satellite to enable connectivity and communications with responders in the field.
- Masts with a camera so analysts can gather information via live video, and a downlink to download video recorded by a helicopter.

- A radio Regional Interoperability System for enhanced communications ability.
- Ability to print large maps and charts.
- Four-channel digital video recorder system for recording various cameras on and around the vehicle.
- Outside display monitor and presentation area to accommodate a larger group.
- Touchscreen LED televisions and conference room.

"We did not want to buy technology for today; we wanted to buy it for the future. For example, LED technology is lighter, thinner and cheaper so we made it part of the specifications," Spratley says.

"The vehicle is a large, box van style command post vehicle. The difference is the way we designed it," he adds. "We wanted to use every square inch of the space. Many times mobile command vehicles disregard the driver area. We had the builder install a computer workstation in the driver's area in the front, so while the analysts are in the back of the vehicle crunching the information, and command staff are working with the information, officers on the street can use the workstation to download their data and then continue their work in the field."

The mobile command vehicle can be utilized by multiple law enforcement and emergency response agencies in the entire Northern Nevada area and be dispatched during natural or manmade disasters and assist in data collection for all incidents. Responders in the field can also carry rugged handheld computers with a special application developed in-house at WCSO to transmit mapping and other data back to the vehicle for the analysts.

Spratley notes that the sheriff's office deployed the vehicle in the fall of 2012 when a major weather system caused flooding and knocked out power to the Lake Tahoe substation. The response vehicle was driven to the substation so radio capability could be patched in for dispatch.

The vehicle also has been deployed during a wildfire and special events. Desiree Hubbell, the technology systems developer for WCSO who provides technical support for the vehicle, notes that in a fire situation, responders equipped with mobile devices can verify which properties have been damaged and send the information back to the vehicle.

“It helps us manage our resources better and results in the better use of personnel and of our finances,” Spratley says.

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