



Media Release

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Regional Districts switch to E-Comm for 9-1-1 call answer

9-1-1 call answer services will have a new provider in the Fraser-Fort George, Cariboo, Bulkley-Nechako and Kitimat-Stikine Regional Districts. Beginning this fall, 9-1-1 calls from these areas will be answered through E-Comm, the emergency communication centre located in southwest British Columbia.

The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George provides 9-1-1 services to all municipalities and electoral areas of the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, Cariboo Regional District, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako and most areas of the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine.

At present, the Regional District contracts with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for call answer services. All 9-1-1 calls come into a Public Safety Answering Point, located within the RCMP North District Operational Communications Centre (OCC). A 9-1-1 call taker determines the nature of the emergency and quickly transfers the caller to the appropriate response agency (police, fire or ambulance).

"The Regional District's contract with the RCMP has expired this year and that has provided the opportunity to explore other options for call answer services," says Regional District of Fraser-Fort George Board Chair Art Kaehn. "As a result, the Regional District has entered into an agreement to have 9-1-1 calls answered through E-Comm in Vancouver." The change is expected to come into effect sometime later this year.

There are considerable cost savings by moving to E-Comm. With the number of communities already serviced through E-Comm, there are economies of scale which reduce annual costs by close to 50%. Under the new model, 9-1-1 call answer services will be significantly reduced from approximately \$730,000 per year to about \$365,000 per year.

"With E-Comm's proven track record of reliable and efficient service, we will be able to continue to provide the quality service our residents are accustomed to, but in a more cost-efficient manner," states Cariboo Regional District Chair Al Richmond.

"The Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako is pleased with the transfer of services to E-Comm with its proven track record and ability to reduce costs to our residents," says Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Chair Bill Miller.

"The integrity of the 9-1-1 system is paramount. E-Comm is a leader in 9-1-1 call answer services, and they have a proven track record to deliver reliable services without compromising on response times," says Bruce Bidgood, Chair of the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine.

E-Comm is the emergency communications centre located in southwest British Columbia. E-Comm's integrated multi-jurisdictional call taking and dispatch centre provides economies-of-scale, the ability to deliver top-tier technology to both larger and smaller communities throughout the province, with increased operational efficiency. E-Comm received 861,694 emergency calls in 2013, answering 98% of them in five seconds or less. This exceeds the annual contracted target of 95% of calls answered in 5 seconds.

"We are very pleased with our new partnership and are committed to ensuring residents of the regional districts continue to receive high-quality, responsive 9-1-1 public-safety answer point service 24-hours a day," says E-Comm CEO David Guscott.

The E-Comm building is a secure, purpose-built facility designed to resist a major earthquake (7+) and be self-sufficient for 72 hours. E-Comm has a number of back-up provisions to ensure the continuity of 9-1-1 call answer services in a variety of scenarios.

"We are pleased to be able to provide more cost-effective 9-1-1 call answer services without compromising the reliability or safety of the 9-1-1 system that residents in our region have trusted," says Kaehn.

"Public safety remains to be the RCMP's top priority and this change in service provider will not at all compromise the safety of the residents in the Fraser Fort-George area," says Inspector Rick Greenwood, BC RCMP Operational Communications Centre Program Management. "The community can be assured that the level of service that our Operational Communications Centre employees in providing police dispatching, complaint taking and status keeping will be maintained at the highest level that the community expects" he adds.

With the change to E-Comm for 9-1-1 call answer services, calls will continue to be dispatched in the same manner. This means calls for police will be dispatched to the RCMP OCC in Prince George. Calls for fire departments will be dispatched through the Fire Operations Communications Centre (FOCC) in Prince George and calls for ambulance will be dispatched through the BC Ambulance Service dispatch centre in Kamloops.

In 2013, 71,000 9-1-1 calls were received within the boundaries of the Regional District's 9-1-1 service. 28,209 calls were received from the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, 18,364 calls from the Cariboo Regional District, 10,041 from the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District, and 14,386 from the Kitimat/Stikine area.

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Media Contacts:

Regional District of Fraser-Fort George

Renee McCloskey
250 960-4453

Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako

Bill Miller
250-696-3211

E-Comm

Jasmine Bradley
604-215-5023
Pager: 604-640-1342

Cariboo Regional District

Shelly Burich
250-392-3351

Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine

Bob Marcellin
1-800-663-3208

RCMP

CM Chris Spence
250-561-3188

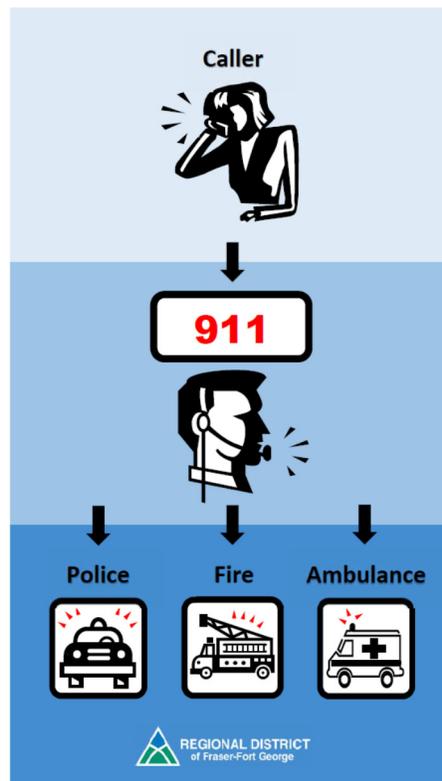
Questions about changes to 9-1-1 service within the Regional District

The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George provides 9-1-1 services to all municipalities and electoral areas of the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, the Cariboo Regional District, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako and most areas of the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine. The 9-1-1 service area covers 241,111 square kilometres.

At present, the Regional District contracts with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for call answer services. All 9-1-1 calls come into a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), located within the RCMP North District Operational Communications Centre (OCC). A 9-1-1 call taker determines the nature of the emergency and quickly transfers the caller to the appropriate response agency (police, fire or ambulance).

The Regional District's contract with the RCMP has expired this year, providing the opportunity to explore other options for call answer services. After an extensive evaluation, the Regional District has entered into an agreement to have 9-1-1 calls from our area answered through E-Comm, the emergency communications centre located in southwest British Columbia. The change is expected to come into effect sometime later this year.

How 9-1-1 works in the Regional District



What is E-Comm?

E-Comm is the emergency communications centre located in southwest British Columbia. E-Comm answers almost 900,000 9-1-1 calls each year for Metro Vancouver, the Sunshine Coast Regional District and Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (south), and provides dispatch services to 15 police agencies and 18 fire departments. E-Comm's integrated multi-jurisdictional call taking and dispatch centre provides economies-of-scale, the ability to deliver top-tier technology to both large and smaller communities, with increased operational efficiency.

Would it be faster to have 9-1-1 calls answered locally?

E-Comm has some of the toughest call-answer targets in North America and consistently meets or beats those targets on an annual basis – year after year. E-Comm received 861,694 emergency calls in 2013, answering 98% of them in five seconds or less. This exceeds the annual contracted target of 95% of calls answered in 5 seconds.

If a rural resident calls 9-1-1 for police, how will a 9-1-1 operator in Vancouver know where to send help?

9-1-1 calls received by E-Comm will be transferred to the same dispatch centres that are used presently. For example, if someone in Salmon Valley calls 9-1-1 and requests police assistance, the E-Comm operator would transfer the call to the RCMP dispatch centre based in Prince George. A transition plan is currently under development and will take into account all of the many technical and operational needs required to ensure this service remains seamless for residents.

Where are the dispatch centres for ambulance and fire calls from our area?

Ambulance calls are transferred to a dispatch centre in Kamloops where they will dispatch local ambulance units. Fire calls are transferred to the Fire Operations Communications Centre (FOCC) located in Prince George Firehall No. 1. The FOCC dispatches 79 different fire rescue agencies throughout the Fraser-Fort George, Cariboo, Bulkley-Nechako and Kitimat-Stikine Regional Districts.

Why switch call answer service providers?

The Regional District's emergency services will be strengthened by having its 9-1-1 operations located in a secure, purpose-built facility that has many built-in redundancies and other special features such as 24/7 call centre management oversight to support staff, a back-up site and access to more staffing resources to manage sudden influxes of 9-1-1 calls as there is a larger workforce to draw from.

E-Comm has invested in the latest technologies to provide proven reliable and effective call answer services. They provide 9-1-1 call answer services to a number of communities in BC and as such operational expenses are shared amongst a larger group which provides cost savings for the Regional District. To find out more information please visit www.ecomm911.ca.

How reliable are E-Comm's 9-1-1 call answer services

E-Comm has operated a 9-1-1 primary PSAP and a secondary PSAP for 14 years and has earned a reputation as a leading emergency communications centre in North America.

E-Comm uses a variety of technologies to support 9-1-1 call-answer and has worked very closely with TELUS over the past 14 years to optimize the 9-1-1 call-handling system to ensure that its emergency dispatch centre provides 9-1-1 call answering with the highest levels of service and reliability. E-Comm maintains an ongoing maintenance and upgrade strategy for all critical systems to ensure they are all kept up-to-date.

Other advantages:

- E-Comm's primary infrastructure asset is a 60,000 square-foot purpose-built reinforced concrete facility complete with multiple power sources: Hydro power, UPS and diesel generators, and multiple communication redundancies from TELUS to ensure continuous service for its mission-critical operations.
- Off-site back-up capability for all PSAP, call-taking and dispatch operations.

Will switching to E-Comm save the Regional District money?

There are considerable cost savings by moving to E-Comm. Considering the number of communities already serviced through E-Comm there are economies of scale which reduce our costs by about 45%. Under the new model, 9-1-1 call answer services will be significantly reduced from approximately \$730,000 per year down to about \$365,000.

In addition, E-Comm has already invested in updated call answer technology. If we were to maintain 9-1-1 call answer services locally, we would have to absorb the full cost of any technology or system upgrades for call answer services.

Looking forward, E-Comm is also taking a leadership role in the development of a long-term vision of 9-1-1 through the development of the "Next Generation 9-1-1" (NG911) system for B.C.

Will switching to E-Comm affect the 9-1-1 services the Regional District provides to the Cariboo Regional District, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako and the Kitimat-Stikine Regional District?

The Regional District provides 9-1-1 call answer and fire dispatch services to the Cariboo, Bulkley-Nechako and Kitimat-Stikine Regional Districts through a contract. The Regional District has consulted extensively with our partners about the change in call answer services and we are pleased that we will continue to provide 9-1-1 call answer services through a contract. The switch to E-Comm provides significant savings that will be passed on to our partners. The change does not impact fire dispatch services. Those services will continue to be provided by the FOCC.

What's involved in switching call answer service providers?

The transition of 9-1-1 call-answer service providers will require development and implementation of a detailed plan that will include primarily the Regional Districts, TELUS and E-Comm. There are network configuration changes that will need to be designed, implemented and tested as well as the development, implementation and training of new processes and procedures at E-Comm. The testing of the network configurations, processes and procedures will include calls from each of the municipalities as well as confirmation of the 9-1-1 call transfers to each of the existing downstream BC Ambulance, RCMP and Fire Dispatch Centres through the normal and back-up configurations.