Partnering for public safety excellence in Alabama

Huntsville-Madison County 911 Center relies on advanced CAD technology to support 8 agencies
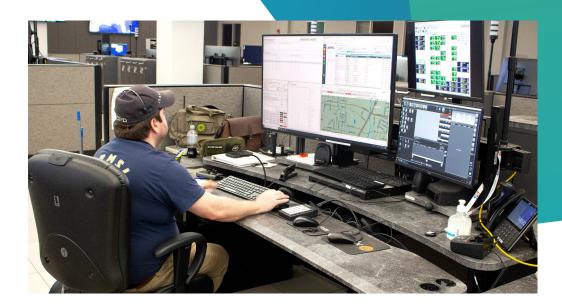
Nicknamed the Rocket City because of its prominence in the post-World War II Space Race, Huntsville is home to a NASA research center and the second largest research park in the U.S. It is also Alabama's most populous city and one of the fastest-growing metro areas in the state.

Serving the public safety needs of this growing region are the dedicated staff of the Huntsville-Madison County 911 Center (HMC 911) who dispatch more than 240,000 emergency calls every year. Its 30,000-square-foot facility houses eight local public safety agencies and their 200 employees.

Wanting to modernize its operations in line with a growing service area and evolving technology, HMC 911 partnered with Hexagon almost 30 years ago to implement Hexagon's industry-leading computer-aided dispatch (CAD) solution and became Hexagon's first multi-agency customer.

Investment in the future

Many years ago, HMC 911 relied on a switchboard, map and telephone operators to handle its emergency dispatching operations, as was the case with most emergency agencies at the time. As Huntsville's

population grew and new technology advanced and became more widely used, HMC 911 decided to invest in a new CAD solution to better serve its community.

It selected Hexagon's CAD solution, and over the next three decades, the partnership between HMC 911 and Hexagon has grown in tandem, with technology evolving and the center continuing to upgrade its system to meet the needs of the burgeoning metro area. The CAD solution provides real-time, critical information from callers, databases and other sources, creating a common operating picture for intelligent response. It automates key functions and enables users to easily visualize calls, events and resources. As the CAD solution is easily integrated with other systems, it enables HMC 911 to continue to harness new technologies and additional data to deliver better service during emergencies and major events.

"We're able to buy the best stuff that's out there. And many, many years ago, we found Hexagon, and we've been great partners ever since," said HMC 911 Director Ernie Blair. "Because of Hexagon technology, somebody in here saves a life, protects property and just overall makes life better, and the quality of life in Huntsville, Alabama, better."

HMC 911 is now the largest and most advanced emergency communications center in Alabama. Its robust CAD system integrates text-to-911 technology to aid those unable to call 911, such as hearing- or speech-impaired individuals. It also has a complete, secondary, backup 911 phone system for use in the case of a catastrophic outage of its primary phone system. Additional space in its 30,000-square-foot facility is available for use in the event of a mass casualty or large-scale emergency incident.

Multiple uses for multiple agencies

HMC 911 handles all call-taking and emergency and non-emergency radio dispatching for Madison County and part of neighboring Limestone County. Calls come into the combined center and call-takers determine which agency to dispatch. If all dispatchers are busy, calls overflow to other agencies to ensure a rapid response to emergencies. All dispatchers use the Hexagon CAD solution, which integrates with several other systems, including a locator, phone system and a software system that provides scripted information to aid dispatchers in gaining information from callers.

Eight agencies dispatch from the combined center: the Madison County Sheriff's Office, Madison County Fire Department, Huntsville Police Department, Huntsville Fire & Rescue, City of Madison Police Department, Madison Fire & Rescue, Huntsville Emergency Medical Services and the Huntsville-Madison County 911 System. Additionally, more than 200 mobile units are in use across these departments, connecting first responders to the CAD system and data.

"If we didn't have a CAD system like this, collaborating with other agencies and coordinating the appropriate response and saving lives would be very tough," said HMC 911 Dispatcher Mary Gomes.