RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Data Security for Emergency Communications Centers

Technology has revolutionized every aspect of our lives, including emergency communications. Modern communication systems and computer networks are custom designed for specific industries. Their operation may require the exchange of digital data across platforms including servers, microwave systems and on and off-site (cloud) data storage mediums. While some of the information contained in these systems is public record, there are still security concerns. Breaches can affect the computer aided dispatch (CAD) system, geographic information (GIS) mapping system and the radio network. Data security breaches could be part of some type of criminal activity or cyber-attack or be a by-product of another network breach. The risk is the intentional or unintentional interruption of service that may not be discovered until system reliability is compromised.

To help lessen the risk of a breach, consider developing a data/information technology (IT) security plan in conjunction with system partners. This may include the Telephone System Company provider, GIS provider, CAD vendor, Internet vendor and the communications/radio vendor.

The plan may address:

- Assigning a responsible person for security functions.
- Training and educating employees that have access to data systems.
- Establishing policies to limit or restrict personal use of computer equipment.
- Physical security measures at equipment rooms and remote server sites.
- Network security for all IP based systems.
- Provisions to help prevent cyber-attacks on the center's computers and servers.
- Plans to update operating and security software periodically, including secondary public safety answering points (PSAP) locations or emergency operating sites.
- A written policy to address or investigate suspicious activity or complaints.
- Periodic auditing of the total IT security system.

Additional information and resources can be found in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1221: "Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems" or by visiting VFIS.com .