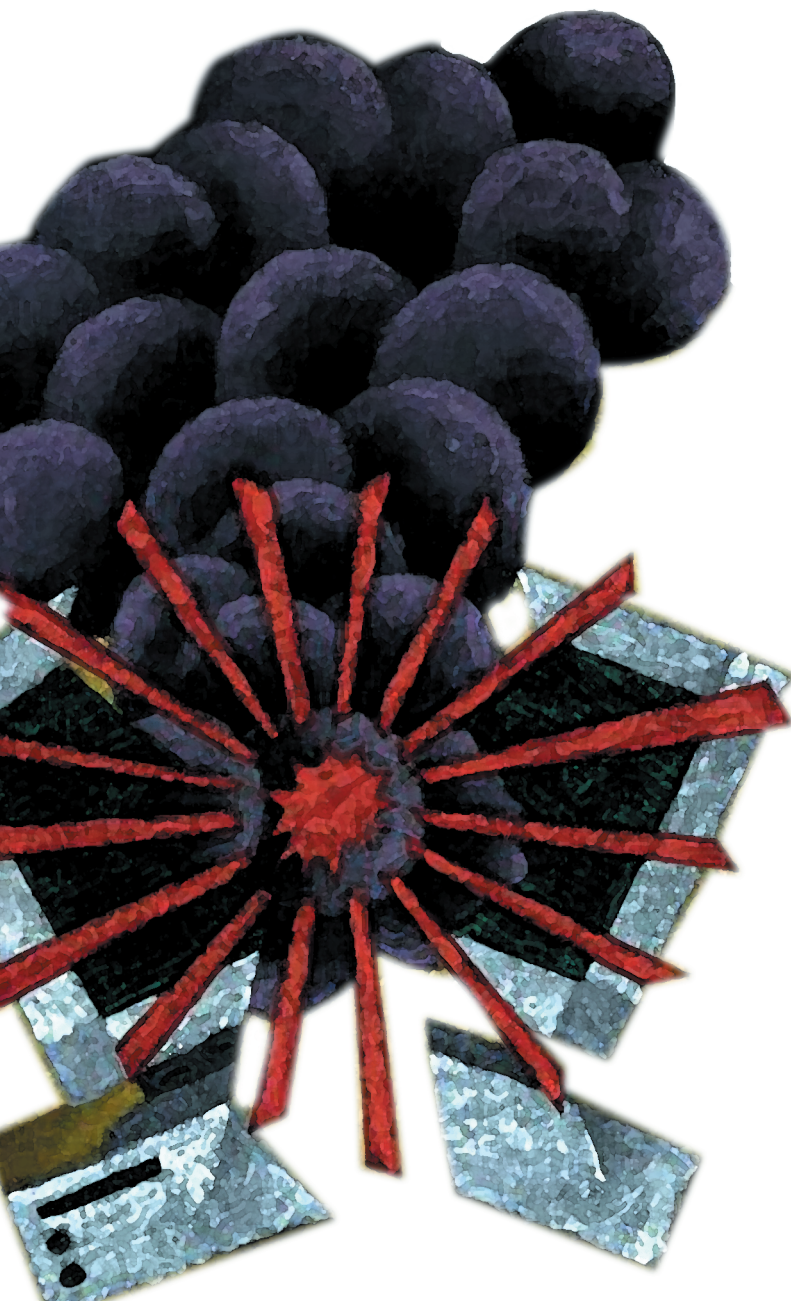# AVOIDING CALL CENTER
EQUIPMENT FAILURE AND DOWNTIME

BY GARETH WILLIAMS, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, CENCOM

WITH A CALL VOLUME OF MORE THAN 130,000 PER YEAR, EQUIPMENT FAILURE AND DOWNTIME IN A CALL CENTER IS UNACCEPTABLE.

IN MISSION-CRITICAL SITUATIONS WHERE RELIABILITY AND accountability are paramount, seconds can often mean the difference between life and death. As such, public safety communications professionals should not focus on their call center's equipment, but on their tasks at hand in helping save lives.

CenCom—a fire and EMS communication center at Summit, NJ's Overlook Hospital—has installed highly functional public safety communications equipment to help them work quickly, easily and more effectively. Founded in 1981, CenCom was the first regional advanced life support dispatch center in the state and has since served as the model for how paramedic dispatching is implemented.

Today it dispatches nineteen paramedic units for five counties; provides 9-1-1 emergency medical dispatch and call screening service to twenty-one municipalities; fire dispatching for two municipalities; and serves as the national disaster medical system coordination center for all of New Jersey. With a call volume of more than 130,000 per year, equipment failure and downtime is unacceptable.

Finding a Solution

Originally, CenCom was using a twenty-channel DAT recorder to record all radio and telephone transmissions. Retrieving an archived conversation with recorded tape was a tedious, time-consuming task. A staff member would

CenCom purchased a 120-channel digital voice logging and archiving system.
Photos courtesy of Eventide.

The Eventide installation at CenCom.

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The intuitive graphical user interface allows for easy navigation of the entire system.

initially have to dig through boxes and boxes of old tapes to find the one containing the content or recorded conversation. From there, one would have to go through the entire tape just to find the segment containing the conversation.

CenCom looked at several outlets and different ways to replace the DAT recorder that offered the highest level of functionality for recording and storing information. Because its territory is continuously expanding, CenCom was looking for a logging and archiving system that easily adjusted to the company's continual growth—without having to deal with new hardware upgrades. By finding a system with the capabilities to easily upgrade, the cost of reconfiguring the entire public safety communications call center would be drastically reduced.

CenCom tested a sixteen-channel, Linux-based digital voice logging and archiving system, but due to the company's high call volume, the system needed to suit specific needs. CenCom then purchased a 120-channel digital voice logging and archiving system from Eventide (Little Ferry, NJ)—developer of the first digital voice logger.

The Linux platform has enabled CenCom to expand its quality assurance process to a much larger sampling of calls in the same amount of time. The product is extremely easy to operate and fast in the retrieval of calls with its call record browser software. It has the ability to recreate an incident without including any unnecessary third-party transmissions and is an effective tool for creating and e-mailing .WAV files to an outside agency requesting to review the call.

The intuitive graphical user interface allows for easy navigation

of the entire system. CenCom staff can easily browse past calls and call them up from the digital logger or from a networked computer. This random access drastically cuts down the time it takes to search for archived information—what used to take hours of time can now be in done in seconds. In addition, the Linux platform gives the logger rock-solid reliability and will continue to function as a stand-alone logger if the network goes down.

CenCom has built a state-of-art public safety call center with a 120-channel digital voice logging and archiving system serving as the backbone with KML providing the 9-1-1 telephone system. A four-position Zetron communications console also was implemented to control the radio network. The radio system consists of thirty-three base stations operating on twenty different frequencies. The CAD systems used from Tritech Software Systems provide the dispatcher with unit recommendations based on the location and response plans, depending on the type of incident.

With a new communications call center, CenCom doesn't have to worry about its equipment malfunctioning. By eliminating worries and time-consuming tasks, its public safety communications professionals can be more focused on saving lives. **ENPM**

Gareth Williams is the communications manager for CenCom (Summit, NJ) and is a certified paramedic in the state of New Jersey. He has been employed with CenCom for twenty-two years and started as one of the original full-time dispatchers. Williams serves as the central region vice president for the New Jersey Chapter of NENA and the EMS coordinator for Emergency Management for Union County.