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ACQUISITIONS

Remarks

By Mr. Shepard

It is now nearly three years since it was announced that the three digit 911 had been designated as the new universal emergency number for the United States.

During that time, considerable progress has been made in implementing the 911 concept. We have also learned a good deal about 911 systems both through experience and through various studies. This afternoon, I would like to provide a brief status report on 911 along with some observations on what has been learned in the past three years.

As you probably recall, the announcement of the 911 concept by AT&T was generally well received by the public. Certainly, the press in most parts of the country gave it a strong endorsement.

There were, nevertheless, some misgivings among public safety officials, including some members of this organization. This was probably due, at least in part, to the fact that the announcement came as an unexpected position change by the Bell System. Up until shortly before the decision was made to offer a three digit universal emergency number, the Bell System had made a strong case for retaining the system of distinct numbers for the various safety agencies with dial "zero" for operator as a backup "universal emergency number."

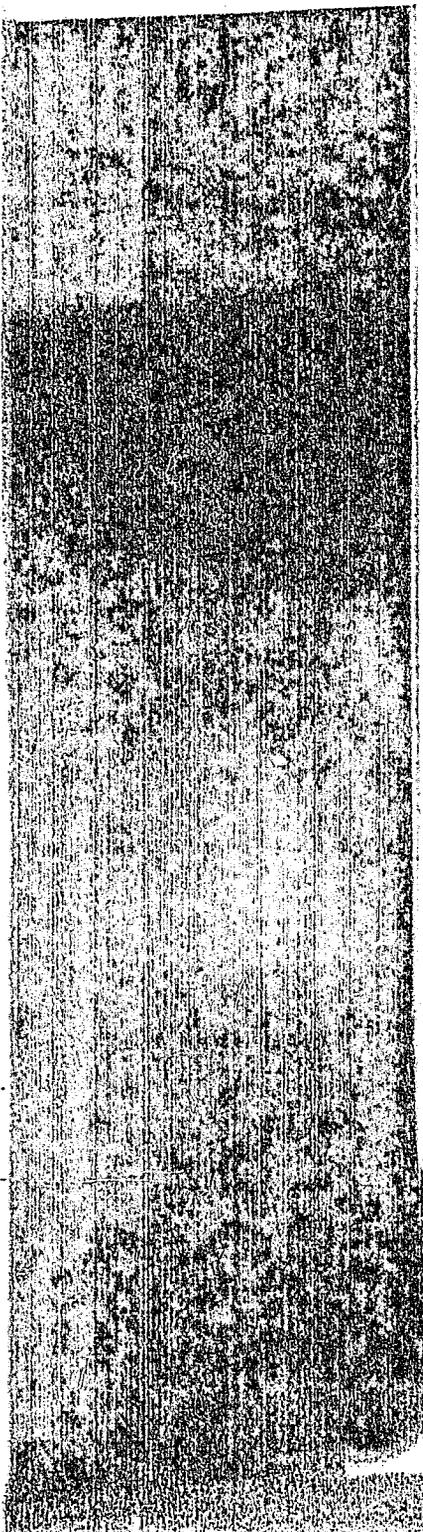
It had become obvious, however, that there was growing political and public pressure for a change and that there were valid reasons, such as increasing urbanization and rising crime rates, for moving in the direction of a universal emergency number.

As far back as 1967, the Commission on Law Enforcement—or Crime Commission as it is more commonly referred to—recommended that:

"Wherever practical, a single (emergency) telephone number be established, at least within a metropolitan area and eventually over the entire United States."

The suggestion for a universal emergency number was quickly adopted by a number of senators and congressmen who introduced resolutions calling for the establishment of a nationwide emergency telephone number. Meanwhile two other commissions began to pursue the question of civil disorders, expressed

67185



concern over emergency reporting systems and asked the Federal Communications Commission to look into the matter. Lee Loevinger, then defense commissioner of the FCC, began discussions with telephone industry officials in which he strongly urged that every effort be made to find a means of developing an emergency number system that could be put into effect as quickly as possible—and then to take steps to see that this was done.

Mr. Loevinger saw the need in these terms:

"It is literally impossible to inform the public in a large metropolitan area of all the emergency agencies and facilities available or to teach it several ordinary but seldom-used telephone numbers. However, one three digit number is remembered and known, and the small cadre of professional attendants of an emergency switchboard can be kept fully informed and in a position to make a calm and skilled judgement as to the appropriate emergency agency for virtually any kind of an emergency."

The FCC was not unaware of the many problems inherent in the universal number concept when it urged a single emergency number. However, as Mr. Loevinger put it:

"The real issue . . . is whether the burden of coping with emergencies and the threats to life and safety posed by emergencies and with the confusing and conflicting complexity of governmental agencies shall be imposed upon the public, or whether the various agencies established to serve the public will assume the burden of cooperation among themselves to resolve such problems and to provide assistance to the public in emergencies as quickly and efficiently as possible."

As a result of the various recommendations plus an extensive reevaluation of the situation, the Bell System agreed to do what it could to establish a universal emergency in this country. And so, on January 12, 1968 it was announced that "911" had been made available as the new universal number.

Under the 911 concept, everyone, regardless of the nature of the emergency, would dial the code "911." The call would be routed from its originating central office, via dedicated trunks, directly to a government-operated reporting center. The success of the plan, of course, was predicated on the assumption that inter-agency cooperation could be achieved and all emergency calls for a community or group of communities could be handled at a single location.

The plan was seen as having many advantages:

- The public has no decision as to what number to dial; the same number would always be dialed regardless of the emergency.
- The number is brief, uncomplicated, and requires at the most, just a second or two more than the number which the majority of people were using to report emergencies—namely, zero for operator.
- No telephone company employee intervention is necessary to query the customer as to where he lives, or as to what is the nature of the emergency.
- Finally, and perhaps most important, the 911 plan offers the potential for cutting precious second from the response time since it gives the public direct access to an emergency dispatching center.

Today, 911 is in use in more than 100 communities in every part of the country. More than 50 other cities are scheduled to introduce 911 systems, and it is being considered by many others.

Granted, many of the locations which have 911 are small. This is because it is usually easier to implement a 911 system in smaller communities. Nevertheless, a number of large cities have adopted the new universal number.

In New York City, for example, people are placing 911 calls more than 18,000 times day. These call include not only police, but also fire and ambulance calls. A number of other major cities now have 911 including Springfield, Mass.; Buffalo, N. Y.; Suffolk County, N. Y., which incidentally handles over 4,200 calls a day; Jackson, Miss.; Lincoln and Omaha, Nebr.; Baton Rouge, La.; Galveston, Texas, and also here in Atlantic City.

We estimate that approximately 14 million people now have the capability to place emergency calls via 911. For a program less than three years old, this, I think, represents pretty fair progress.

While I am on the subject of progress let me mention some of those other major cities which now have 911 scheduled: They include Denver, Seattle, Toledo, Nashville, Jacksonville, Fla., Birmingham, Huntsville, Ala. and others.

This does not mean that it's all down hill from here. The problems associated with any universal number still exist. Common answering centers have to be established, inter-agency cooperation must be obtained, and jurisdictional problems resolved. Then and only then can the expensive equipment modifications be made.

The resolution of these problems will vary from community to community and will depend on local needs and circumstances. However, based on the experience in communities which now have 911 service, some general guidelines are emerging.

For one thing, it is not necessary to establish a new super communications agency to accommodate 911 service. Present personnel and facilities now dedicated to receiving emergency calls from seven digit public safety numbers and via telephone operators may well be adequate. However, this should be reviewed critically.

The dispatching function in 911 systems does not have to be physically associated with the answering point. In smaller communities, the same individual may handle both the answering and dispatching functions. In larger cities, they may be separated to accommodate command and control systems.

The answering responsibilities for 911 service could fall with either the police, fire or some interdepartmental organization. However, since approximately 80 per cent of all emergency calls are for police assistance, the most practical arrangement may be for the police to answer 911 calls and have the capability of rapidly transferring fire and emergency medical calls to the appropriate fire and ambulance dispatchers or separate jurisdiction if involved.

Adding to our knowledge of 911 are two recent studies which I believe deserve special attention.

The first is the Franklin Institute Research Laboratories study which was undertaken to determine approximately two years after introduction from an objective point of view if in fact the need really did exist for a single emergency number, and secondly, if the implementation of such a number were feasible. They concluded that a single emergency number was needed and feasible, and went on to recommend that it be implemented nationally.

Two quotes from the study deserve special note:

"Most of the objections to a single number arise because many individuals do not have a clear understanding of a single emergency concept.

FIRL found that those who had experience with a single number are generally in favor of the system, while those who have not had experience with the concept are generally opposed. To eliminate these misconceptions, FIRL recommends that a national program of public education be initiated to inform the people of what a single emergency telephone number is, what it can do, and what it cannot do. Such a program could provide an additional benefit by educating the public not to misuse an emergency telephone number."

"Many public safety organizations seem to find fault with a single number system when the fault actually lies within the organization. Organizations must be prepared to adjust to innovations in technology when these innovations are in the best interests of the public. FIRL recommends that public safety organizations consider evaluating their organizational structures to determine if, in fact, the inability to work with a single number concept is an organizational problem rather than a technological problem."

As part of this study, the Franklin Institute devoted a lot of attention to the problem of response time. This, as you know, is one of the major concerns or problems raised in objecting to implementing 911. However, the FIRL stated that response time should be measured from the time need for assistance is detected and not from the moment a call is received. If this earlier time element is considered—not having to fumble for the proper number—they concluded that 911 can contribute significantly to total time saved.

A second study on 911 was recently completed by the National Service to Regional Councils. NSRC was established in 1967—under the auspices of the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties—to assist the rapidly growing number of Regional Councils of Government in setting up and improving their various programs.

The NSRC study of 911 was partially funded through a contract with AT&T and was intended to evaluate the feasibility of implementing 911 systems.

Allow me to summarize some of their principal findings.

From a national perspective, the NSRC found that there is a great lack of information or knowledge about 911 on the part of both public officials and the general public. They also concluded that funding assistance would be made available through a national program to assist local governments in implementing 911. In addition, local governments should be encouraged to make use of existing funding possibilities.

From the local government perspective, the NSRC study offered these observations:

- Perhaps the greatest benefit to be derived from 911, beside improved public service, is that to properly implement the system, local governments must carefully review, evaluate and possibly upgrade their existing emergency communications systems.
- In every area where 911 has been adopted, a prominent local official has had to push the concept as an issue, sometimes publicly.
- Local elected officials, by and large, are very receptive to 911. They view 911 as a short term, high visibility activity which has visible payoffs for the public.
- Local staff officials, those of emergency service agencies, are generally not receptive to 911. This is less true for police than for fire agency

officials. Most see only the problems 911 will present their agency, and fail to see countervailing benefits to the public.

Looking at the system design aspects, NSRC drew these conclusions:

- In any community at least police, fire and emergency medical services should be directly included in 911.
- An issue that arises at the outset, when considering a system such as 911, is whether it is to serve as a replacement for existing numbers or as a backup number to be used only in the absence of better information. To be effective, 911 should be the primary emergency number in a community—the number to call in an emergency situation.
- Reception of 911 call should be centralized to the extent practically and politically feasible. It is not critical which agency answers the call, if there is a well-designed system for handling other agency or misdirected calls.
- The most critical aspect of the system design is the procedure established for handling the call when received. Therefore, this process should be designed to meet the specific requirements of each community and agency served by the 911 system.

And they came to the same conclusion as Franklin Institute that if the system is well-designed, response time should be reduced when measured from the time the citizen is aware of the need for help, rather than from the time the call is received by the emergency agency.

Finally, the NSRC reviewed the regional aspects of 911. In this context, they made these observations:

- 911 service cannot be provided in any community—large or small—without coordination, cooperation and the involvement of adjacent jurisdictions. The incompatibility of telephone exchange boundaries and political boundaries dictates a multijurisdictional or regional effort.
- Because of overlapping political and exchange boundaries, a general overview or plan should be developed early for the entire system or combination of jurisdictions, prior to implementation in any one community. This overview should be modified as problems arise or are solved.

“The piecemeal approach to implementation—cutting over as a city develops and as company equipment is available—is dysfunctional to this planning process.”

- Achieving interjurisdictional, interagency cooperation continues to be the most pressing challenge.

It is obvious from these studies that there are still a number of problems that must be resolved as we proceed in the introduction of the universal emergency number concept. On the other hand, we have been able to resolve many of the problems that loomed large when 911 systems were first proposed.

We hope that today's meeting—like earlier meetings with other safety agency organizations—will help contribute to the understanding of what 911 is all about. In the simplest of terms, 911 is merely a response to an expressed public need.

We are pledged to work with public safety agencies and government officials in developing orderly, workable arrangements for 911 service. We are doing this in many cities across the nation. It is a big job and one that requires considerable effort and cooperation. However, the advantages of having single, easy-to-remember emergency numbers to summon aid far outweighs the problems in

achieving it. After all, you—the public safety officials—as well as we in the telephone industry, are ultimately responsible to the same citizenry for which the system is intended.

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