

Arlington County ECC, Virginia, US

Better equipped to provide first-class emergency services



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Jeffrey Horwitz, 911 System and Resource Manager, ECC, Arlington County, Virginia

When a hijacked plane hit the US Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the emergency call was received by the Arlington County Emergency Communications Center (ECC). There’s no better way of illustrating the importance of an effective and efficient ECC. Established in 1980 as one of the first consolidated centers in the country, the ECC serves as the 911 and dispatch center for the County’s police, fire and emergency medical services. Since May 2008, the brand-new ECC building boasts a high-quality Barco visualization solution, which is deployed for numerous applications.

BARCO

Visibly yours

As a dense, urban community with a mix of residential and commercial neighborhoods and a significant federal presence, including the Pentagon, Arlington requires first-class emergency response services. That was proven, more than ever, on September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of the disaster, the authorities realized the ECC needed an upgrade: more 911 lines, call-taking capacity and space and a new digital radio system for increased interoperability with local, state and federal partners. Enhanced ergonomics were needed to maximize productivity, efficiency and comfort for the operators. And the TV screen - the sole display-type at the time - needed to be replaced by a high-standard visualization solution.

Unequaled quality and support

An extensive design brainstorm, visits to other emergency centers and a careful comparison of all bidding suppliers, led the ECC to Barco. "We chose Barco displays for their high quality," said Jeffrey Horwitz, 911 System and Resource Manager. "Unique selling points were, for example, that the DLP cubes show not the least bit of glare and the gap between the displays is seamless. Besides that, system integrator The Whitlock Group and the Barco engineers proved very competent. They lent invaluable advice during the design phase and ensured a trouble-free installation."

Flexible, fully networked set-up

Today, two types of Barco displays help the ECC monitor numerous video and data systems. Thirteen 47" LCD panels are strategically placed over the dispatch area, watch desk and roll-call rooms and the foyer. The main dispatch area houses fourteen 50" DLP rear projection wall displays, in a 2x7 configuration. Each display has redundant bulbs to avoid downtime and the custom touch-panel controllers can be replicated by panel software, so that sources can be changed and resources controlled by the click of a mouse.



Thanks to the VPN software, Jeffrey Horwitz can manage the Barco displays remotely, even from his own home. He calls the flexible, networked set-up, redundancy features and extendibility of the displays major innovations on Barco's part. Equally useful are little extras like video and audio cables to plug in laptops and hard drive/DVD recording capabilities, which are particularly handy for post-event reporting.

First success stories

Both the ECC management team and the police make adept use of Barco's system, which got its baptism by fire when Arlington County Police first established its command unit from the ECC on July 4, 2008. "Camera feeds from Iwo Jima, the memorial where large crowds gather to celebrate Independence Day, were fed onto the Barco video wall," Jeffrey Horwitz explained. On September 11, 2008, for the Memorial dedication, there were direct communications with the Pentagon,

including video and audio conferencing possibilities, and the Barco system was on standby to display camera feeds in case of problems on Election Day 2008. And only shortly after the inauguration of the ECC, an unplanned intervention was needed: when a series of bad storms hit Virginia, all pending and active calls for service were displayed and weather forecasts and breaking news were followed on the video wall.

Put it on the wall

The visualization concept is totally new to the Arlington County ECC and Jeffrey Horwitz and his team are impressed by its countless possibilities. They can now tune in to traffic and security cameras, e.g. at the Police/Courts building. Computer-aided dispatch shows statistics on medics and firefighting personnel and maps displayed on the walls help locate police cars and fire apparatus. In the near future, the ECC hopes to visualize the real-time status of utility outages and snow plows. "We can now gain a perfect overview, which helps us to collaborate more efficiently, make decisions faster and plan and respond better to emergencies. In fact, we have a new expression here for any data or images coming in: 'put it on the wall,'" Jeffrey Horwitz concluded with a smile. "It illustrates our enthusiasm about this innovative tool, which certainly helps us lift our emergency services to a higher level."

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