

September 24, 2013

9-1-1 dispatch back-up system to the rescue

The North Island 9-1-1 Corporation had a chance to test its call dispatch back-up plan last week – and kept information flowing to emergency responders.

Starting at 10 p.m. on September 18, dispatchers in Courtenay were having trouble transferring 9-1-1 calls to BC Ambulance Service. They quickly activated the new Central and North Island 9-1-1 back-up plan to re-route calls through other dispatch centres.

The Campbell River Fire Department, a busy dispatch centre responsible for directing calls for 50 fire halls on northern Vancouver Island, stepped up to play their support role, and ended up processing a medical call on behalf of BC Ambulance Service in the Powell River area.

“Although telephone service has been reliable, we work to remove any potential obstacles to emergency response, so we made a proactive decision to plan and provide for dispatch services to be shared throughout north and central Vancouver Island (including the Sunshine Coast) in the event of a telephone system service interruption,” says Chris Vrabel, deputy fire chief with the City of Campbell River and fire dispatch manager for the North Island 9-1-1 Corporation. *“This was the first time the plan had been used in a real-life situation, and it worked well, so the outcome for everyone involved was very good.”*

Vrabel says special thanks go out to Campbell River fire dispatchers on duty when the back-up plan was activated: Paula Eppler, Jamie Hofmann and Carol Anderson, who was called in to assist with the extra calls. *“Their professionalism and ability to absorb more calls and transfer information to additional organizations during the telephone service outage was a job very well done.”*

The back-up plan has been in place since June 12, 2013.

“On behalf of the North Island 911 Corporation, thanks to all involved in working through this issue to maintain service continuity for the public,” said Debra Oakman, chief administrative officer for the Comox Valley Regional District and secretary of the North Island 911 Corporation.

Regular 9-1-1 dispatch service was restored in Courtenay by 1 a.m. on September 19.

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