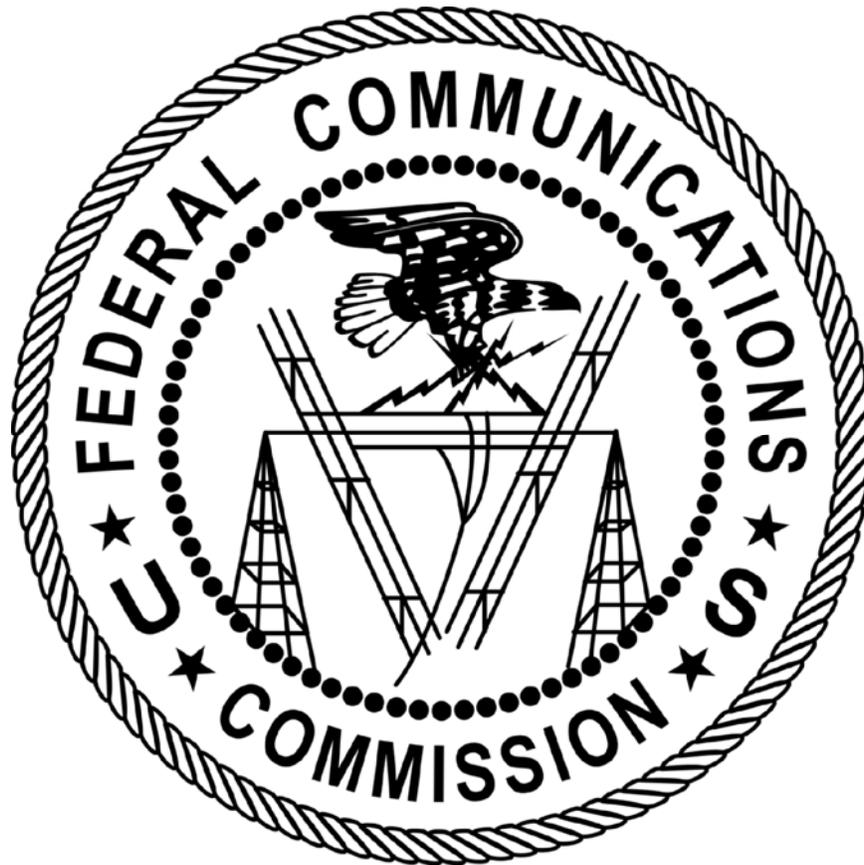


**PUBLIC SAFETY AND HOMELAND SECURITY BUREAU  
Federal Communications Commission**



**Outreach Tour – 9-1-1 Services  
City of Birmingham and Shelby County, Alabama  
September 17-18, 2009**

## **Introduction**

In September 2009, the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC's) Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau (PSHSB) sent an outreach team, comprised of Shawn Lapinski, Director of Emergency Operations; Todd Mitchell, Outreach Specialist; and Robert Kenny, Director of Media Relations; to the Birmingham, Alabama area. The outreach team met with state and local 9-1-1 coordinators representing Baldwin, Chambers, Etowah, Jackson, Tuscaloosa, Shelby and Walker counties, emergency managers with the Birmingham Regional Emergency Medical Services System (BREMSS), and emergency department staff from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Hospital. The visit included introductory meetings led by John Ellison, Executive Director 9-1-1 Services, Shelby County, AL; Art Faulkner, Alabama Department of Homeland Security and State 9-1-1 Coordinator; and Joe Acker, Director of BREMSS.

From September 17-18, the outreach team met with 25 public safety officials and healthcare representatives, and conducted five meetings and site visits to 9-1-1 Public Service Answering Points (PSAPS) or 9-1-1 call centers in Shelby County, the Cities of Pelham and Alabaster, as well as the City of Birmingham's Emergency Operations Center and the UAB Hospital's Emergency Department.

## **Overview**

9-1-1 service is a vital part of our nation's emergency response and disaster preparedness system. Communications at all levels of government and within the public safety community must be reliable, redundant and efficient in any emergency situation. In particular, PSAPs must have operable, reliable, redundant and efficient communications to respond to emergency calls 24 hours/7 days per week.

The outreach team embarked on this tour to gain insight as to how local governments, particularly in rural areas, operate their 9-1-1 service, coordinate with neighboring counties and metropolitan areas (i.e. Shelby County and the City of Birmingham) and utilize federal, state and local funding to further improve their systems.

## **Information Sharing**

The outreach team discussed a number of issues with the public safety community during the visits, including such topics as broadband deployment, FCC emergency response functions, project Roll Call, radio communications, and 9-1-1 services. The outreach team also provided information on Enhanced 9-1-1 and Next Generation Technologies. The team also highlighted the FCC's Emergency Operations Center and the Commission's coordination with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal and state agencies in response to a disaster or emergency under the National Response Plan framework.

Discussions also centered on the deployment of FCC field office personnel and their tactical response efforts as part of the FEMA emergency response team, including collaborative efforts to process communications requests that require state government approval. These sessions focused on requests by broadcasters to gain access to storm-impacted areas, debris removal, refueling for industry, special temporary authority to use spectrum and other high priority requests.

The outreach team shared information from the PSHSB website, calling special attention to the Clearinghouse information pages and the benefits of PSAPs enrolling in communication priority services (i.e. Telecommunications Services Priority (TSP)). The Clearinghouse web pages provide important information to PSAPs including emergency communications plans, interoperability plans, best practices in emergency preparedness, lessons learned, and federal grant information. The outreach team highlighted the Clearinghouse pages as a valuable resource for the public safety community to utilize, provide feedback on, and contribute to on an ongoing basis.

## **Facts and Observations**

### Shelby County 9-1-1 Services

Shelby County 9-1-1 is a division of the County government formed by a vote of the citizens in March of 1988. A board of directors is appointed by the County Commission to oversee the operation of the 9-1-1 system which includes two PSAPs and five law enforcement dispatch centers in the county.

Shelby County 9-1-1 service is primarily funded by a surcharge on telephone services. The County relies almost exclusively on local dollars to support their existing 9-1-1 services and uses state and local dollars to fund the county-wide transition to Next Generation 9-1-1 technologies. Mr. Ellison highlighted Shelby County's transition to Next Generation 9-1-1 services and noted that this transition will happen statewide in the next year or two if appropriate federal funding is secured.

Shelby County also serves as the 9-1-1 Call Center for the city of Alabaster's 9-1-1 calls. Note: 9-1-1 services for police related calls in Alabaster are transferred to and processed within the Alabaster Police Department itself as is done with four other cities not visited as part of this trip. Often, residents of Alabaster and the other cities call the local seven-digit Police Department number rather than 9-1-1 for emergency assistance.

### Next Generation Technologies

PSAPs across the country continue to face new challenges as communications technologies, particularly wireless and broadband, continue to evolve. This increased access to the 9-1-1 system presents technology challenges for a system that was originally designed to respond only to fixed landline 9-1-1 calls. The State of Alabama is seeking to better utilize the available technologies and upgrade their 9-1-1 services to incorporate Next Generation capabilities, particularly as it relates to serving persons with disabilities who rely on text and video messaging to communicate. The Alabama State Department of Homeland Security has received a \$950,000 federal grant that will be matched with local money for a total of \$1.9 million to begin building out its Next Generation 9-1-1 system via a state level Emergency Services Internet Protocol (IP)-enabled Network (ESInet).

This new network will enable access to and backups from other emergency services organizations such as local emergency response services (e.g., fire, EMS, law enforcement), state or regional services and federal agencies. Thus, the backbone network will be part of an interconnected and interoperable system of local, regional and national emergency services networks. This will also enable access to public emergency services by additional personal communication devices and applications. The network will have the capability to accept and share information to improve

response, such as providing an image of the scene of an accident, a survivor's medical records or a building's design specifications.

### E911 Services

All 116 PSAPS in the State of Alabama have Phase II E9-1-1 capabilities. Overall, the public safety officials who participated in discussion indicated that they have had positive experiences with E9-1-1 wireless caller-location accuracy data.

### Birmingham Regional Emergency Medical Services System (BREMMS)

The BREMSS is a component of the University of Alabama at Birmingham Health System, serving a seven-county region in central Alabama and encompassing Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby, Walker and Winston counties. BREMSS is responsible for overall coordination of and improvements to the pre-hospital emergency medical care system within these seven counties and accompanying city jurisdictions.

BREMSS works with all components of the Emergency Medical Services System, which includes over 180 Emergency Medical Services organizations, over 2,500 Emergency Medical Technicians, 18 hospitals, 12 stroke center hospitals, 10 trauma centers, over 80 municipalities, and over 20 9-1-1 agencies.

The BREMSS programs have been extraordinarily successful in improving the quality of care, not only within this seven-county region, but also statewide. The programs enable emergency medical technicians and paramedics to provide pre-hospital emergency medical care based on protocols instead of waiting for a physician's order on each emergency patient.

A state-of-the-art communications system that ties all hospitals and major EMS transport agencies is an example of regional cooperation, planning, and implementation. This EMS communications system, which was implemented at no initial cost to hospitals, is a unique partnership between a commercial provider, local governments, commercial ambulance services, hospitals, 9-1-1 call centers, emergency management agencies, and fire services. BREMSS conceived and implemented a region-wide system and ultimately foresees the implementation of a statewide EMS Communication System.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of the tour, the outreach team gathered valuable information about both public safety resources and needs in central Alabama. We were able to learn about both the technological progress that has occurred in rural areas, as well as some of the challenges facing PSAPs, emergency operations centers, and emergency medical services in Alabama. The tour gave us useful perspective about the technical capabilities of different facilities in the region.

The outreach tour also provided an opportunity to build relationships on the local level and to increase awareness about the FCC, the PSHSB, and the PSHSB Clearinghouse. We learned that certain information from the PSHSB Clearinghouse and website is particularly useful to these entities, such as links to federal grant information and information about the federal government's priority telecommunications services programs. Each of the local agencies have requested additional contact with the FCC. We plan to continue our outreach and coordination efforts to assist them.

\*\*\* The Report was prepared by Robert Kenny, Director of Media Relations, Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau; Shawn Lapinski, Director of Emergency Operations and Todd Mitchell, Outreach Specialist.