

LAW ENFORCEMENT TECHNOLOGY

By Bob Galvin

For fire, police and 911 dispatchers across the country, the prospect of a major incident occurring in their own communities looms large. Equally unsettling is the fear they share of not being able to respond effectively should an incident unfold. It's no wonder, therefore, that interoperability — the mutual pooling of skills, manpower and critical, pre-incident planning information among fire, police and a county-wide 911 communications center — is getting a big thumbs-up by these agencies.

In the community of Canby, Oregon, located south of Portland, and part of Clackamas County, interoperability is part of everyday life, rather than just a concept to be achieved. Capt. Val Codino of the Canby Fire District No. 62 initiated the effort after realizing how vital information sharing among the city's first responders and county 911 dispatch center could be with respect to large-scale incidents.

Until now, Canby FD, like thousands of fire departments nationwide, has been the only agency in its community with detailed layouts of buildings and their contents. The department uses two software programs — Fire Zone, which is used to draw detailed floor plans, and First



Shared plans protect
and save lives



Pre-incident plans, which include a diagram of the structure's floor plan, guide first responders on how to access a building and provide data on the building's contents. A complete hazardous materials reference guide (inset image at left) is also provided.

Look Pro (FLP), a powerful database program used to locate and organize pre-incident plans on mobile computers. Offered by The CAD Zone Inc., located in Beaverton, Oregon, FLP enables users to search for information based on the building name or address, then instantly preview all related diagrams, photos and maps. This preplanning software also has been designed specifically for use on mobile computers with extra-large buttons for ease of use on touchscreens.

Benefits throughout public safety spectrum

A major advantage of FLP software is first responders from both fire and police agencies can now benefit from the same critical pre-incident plans. Police users can view information about the structure, access, utility shut-offs, hazards, perimeters and contacts. Every record also can include diagrams, photographs, tactical plans and other documents. “Few law enforcement agencies

ever really preplan a building for a tactical scenario,” notes Codino. “This is starting, but there’s no need for them to duplicate what we already have in the fire service.”

“The mapping has been a good resource for a joint operation where law enforcement and fire had to work together.”

— **Wayne Senter, International Association of Fire Chiefs**

Codino’s decision to activate interoperability in Canby made sense. The captain, who is a medic, serves on the Canby Police Department’s Tactical Entry Team. He introduced the pre-incident planning software to police officers for use on mobile data computers (MDCs), which this year are being installed in 14 patrol cars. “The preplan software is real handy when you’re going to

big complexes or businesses that you don’t visit very often,” says Sgt. Tim Sommer of the Canby PD. “We want to gather information about a building ahead of time so we can make some decisions.”

The captain has installed FLP pre-incident planning software at both the Canby PD and Clackamas County Central Communications (C-COM). Now, all three agencies have access to the same pre-incident information for all buildings within Canby.

To launch the interoperability system for Canby FD, plus involve the police and 911 center, Codino applied for federal grant money that is readily available for emergency preparedness programs.

Dialing up dispatch

In addition to fire and police personnel, the 911 dispatcher plays an equally valuable role as interoperability evolves. By having access to the same pre-incident plans that fire and police personnel do, dispatchers can then act as a kind of “Seeing Eye dog” for all responders during a major incident, especially for those responders without pre-incident software. For this reason, Codino approached C-COM to install The CAD Zone’s Fire Zone and FLP pre-incident planning programs.

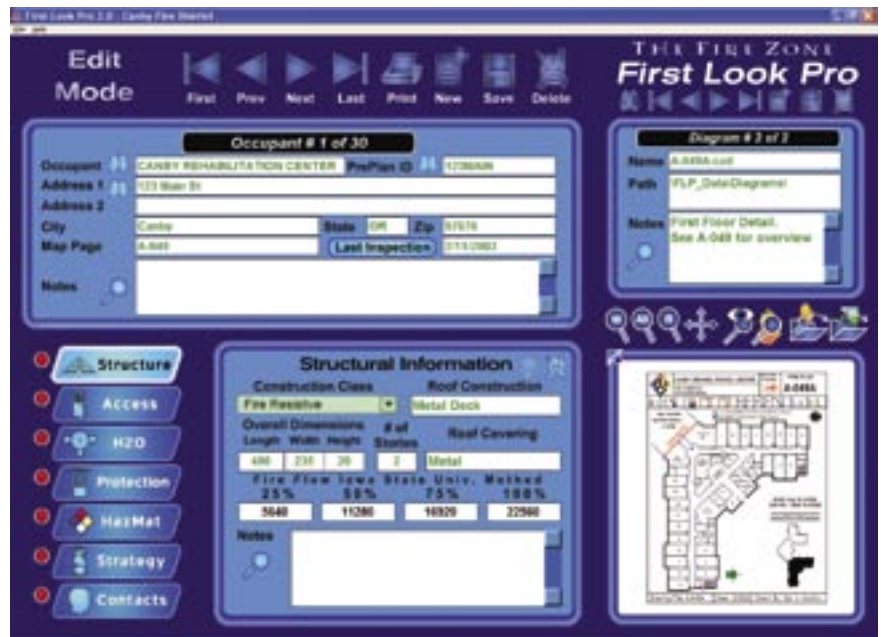
With the programs installed, the fire department updates all preplans frequently, then e-mails the updated files to the 911 dispatchers. Says Jim Paul, one of the county’s emergency communications dispatchers, “If there is an incident involving a high-risk building, what First

Look Pro allows the dispatcher to do is to pull up the pre-incident plan in a virtual format and look at the building that's been laid out by the fire department. The pre-incident plan shows us ways in and out of the building, and if police are called, we can tell them over the radio where they're needed."

Prior to using customized pre-incident software, Paul confesses that paper fire maps have not allowed dispatchers to see what a building looks like. This can be a big hurdle, especially since dispatchers rarely get a chance to visit all buildings in the county.

With electronic pre-incident plans, fire and police responders can build in what strategy they wish to implement for resolving an incident, whether it's a fire or a tactical situation. "With this information," Paul says, "the dispatcher can keep track of where all the responders are going to be. If there's a big incident involving more than two alarms, you want to guide the responders."

Before Codino approached C-COM with pre-incident planning software, Paul recalls how responders would ask the same amount of questions as they do now that the FLP program is in place. "But our ability to help them just wasn't there," Paul says. A big benefit with using pre-incident planning software, Paul continues, is that it allows dispatchers to keep track of times and benchmarks, such as when a fire is under control, or a tactical or police incident has been contained. "We keep track of all of the responders and their times for safety reasons," Paul explains. "And we instruct responders who don't have the software where



the staging area is (for a fire or tactical event)."

Preplanning in action

By combining their inter-agency efforts, and using the electronic pre-incident planning program, Canby police have been able to shut down a methamphetamine operation within the city limits. Using a preplan created with the software program for a two-story apartment complex, in which one unit was suspected of producing meth, police could carefully define a precise plan of attack. The Canby Tactical Entry Team served a search warrant for the apartment. Using the preplan software's mapping function, the tactical team could pinpoint the exact location of a suspected meth lab in action. This helped the team effectively stage its raid without ever being detected.

According to Codino, "The pre-incident plan (shared between fire and police responders) enabled me to plan the raid with police incident commanders and to

coordinate and choreograph how we were going to effectively serve the warrants. All of the officers on the team could see what we were going to do, how the raid was going to flow and where police units should cover in case somebody tried to flee."

Incidents such as the meth lab raid not only allow responders to get comfortable with making interoperability work, but also to see how it could be applied on a larger scale, such as a school shooting, for example. Now that Canby's responder agencies have the pre-incident planning software, they have been able to create detailed floor plans of all school buildings in the area. In the wake of the Columbine High School shootings, Canby's first responders will be well prepared if a similar incident erupts in the community. "We'll go in and try to find that shooter," pledges Sommer. With FLP, "We're able to pull up the building, locate a particular room, set up a perimeter and coordinate our efforts," he explains.

Washington state targets schools

In Washington state, the legislature spent \$3.5 million to implement a statewide emergency preparedness program for all high schools. As part of the program's multi-phase implementation, the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC), along with Seattle-based Prepared Response Inc., mapped every high school facility in the state using a program called Rapid Responder — an interactive emergency response database system.

The Washington state school preplans already have been put to the test. In September 2003, a student shooter at Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, Washington, tried to take over the school, but was contained after just 12 minutes. Rapid Responder had been installed at the school a few weeks before the shooting incident broke out.

According to Wayne Senter, chair of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), even junior high schools throughout Washington state may also expect installations of the mapping

software. "The mapping has been a good resource for a joint operation where law enforcement and fire had to work together," says Senter, who feels the Spokane high school incident was proof that interoperability among first responders can work. "That event (in Spokane) was a successful one," Senter says. "Nobody was killed."

Going the extra step

Although these pre-incident systems have already greatly changed the ways these agencies interoperate, Canby is looking to take the



This diagram shows key building details such as walls, doors, sprinklers, hydrants and FDCs.

systems one step further. To bring Canby's interoperability system up to full speed so that responders can share pre-incident plans, a wireless network is being established. Wireless routers will be installed at the fire and police stations. When fire engines, EMS ambulances or patrol cars pull up to their respective buildings, the routers automatically will survey the MDTs and update preplans for all buildings.

So far, the interoperability experiments in Canby, Oregon, and Washington state have gone smoothly. These scenarios show that interoperability, and the versatile software that powers it, can be highly effective in better equipping responders to protect and save lives. Says Codino: "We're blessed in this community. Canby FD has embraced this technology, but we're also blessed to have police buy into this, as well as our county 911 center. It's a win-win situation for pre-incident planning."

Bob Galvin is a Portland, Oregon, freelance writer who writes about topics related to pre-incident planning and on software programs designed for use among fire and police departments.

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800.641.9077

www.cadzone.com