

ASAP: On the Track and Picking Up Speed!

By Joe Carr



People are always asking, “Why should I participate in ASAP to PSAP?” Or better yet, “What’s in it for me?” In a nutshell, the ASAP [Automated Secure Alarm Protocol] to PSAP [Public Safety Answering Points] program is proving, again and again, to provide measurable improvements to both PSAPs and alarm companies. A case in point is the implementation of the ASAP program in Houston.

Houston went live with ASAP on April 28, 2011. Houston, which covers 634 square miles and has a population of more than 2.3 million people, is the fourth-largest PSAP

in the United States. The Houston Emergency Communications Center receives and processes more than 2,000 police alarms weekly, as well as other non-emergency calls. Currently, 43,000 alarm systems in Houston are being monitored by the three alarm companies currently participating with ASAP—Vector Security, United Central Control (UCC) and Monitronics.

According to Captain William Staney, captain of police, Emergency Communications Division in Houston, since implementing ASAP, the Emergency Communications Division has experienced a consistent 13% drop in the number of police alarms handled by call-takers.

Some of the measurable improvements include the non-emergency telephone call volume, which has been reduced by 15% since ASAP was implemented, and a potential savings of \$1 to \$2 million annually due to the ASAP program. Houston staff is dedicated to answering non-911 lines. As Houston’s non-emergency call volumes drop, staff can be reassigned to other departments and agencies within Houston’s government.



Alarm companies also are enjoying measurable benefits of ASAP. UCC has seen a savings in labor cost and increased operator efficiency. It reports a reduction of

36% in the number of telephone calls to Houston, while at the same time reducing operator hold time 27% in calendar year 2012. The traditional industry method of manually calling the PSAP operator and verbally relaying the request for dispatch can take 1½ to 2 minutes. Electronic ASAP messages only require about 15 seconds.

There also are “intangible” benefits; namely, the addition of bi-directional communication benefits for both the alarm company and the PSAP by facilitating faster and more accurate information exchange.


How Does it Work?

It is common for a responding officer to require additional information upon arrival at the alarm location. In the case of an actual burglary or other crime the officer may request a “key holder,” or someone to come to the location to provide additional information and possibly secure the premise. The recognized method has been for the PSAP operator to call the alarm company and make the request. The alarm company contacts the key holder and advises him or her of what was requested. The alarm company then calls the PSAP back and provides

the PSAP operator with most of the same information provided during the original call, plus the key holder information.

Under the ASAP method, the PSAP sends the alarm company a brief message, and after the subscriber is contacted, the alarm company operator sends another brief message back to the PSAP. With more serious or complex cases, requests from officers to the alarm company may result in multiple requests for additional information.

With the ASAP program, time delays are avoided if added communications should indicate a request to cancel the dispatch, freeing up the PSAP and the alarm company operator.

The bottom line is that ASAP to PSAP works. The most recent PSAPs to come on line include Tempe, Ariz., Washington D.C., and James City County, Va. Several alarm companies are testing the ASAP to the PSAP program in these areas, and are expected to be fully operational very soon. As we continue to add new PSAPs and alarm companies to the program, ASAP will improve with better communication and reduced costs for the alarm companies, PSAPs and tax payers in relevant jurisdictions. 

Joe Carr is dealer relations representative with United Central Control and co-chair of CSAA International’s ASAP Outreach Committee. He can be reached at: jcarr@teamucc.com.