

INTRADO PUSHES FOR ENHANCED PROTOCOLS IN 911 MESSAGING

by Tim McElligott

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Hoping to create a better operating environment for carriers and public safety organizations that will adapt to new technologies, Intrado, the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions, and carriers including Qwest and BellSouth will work together to establish standards-enhanced messaging protocols.

ATIS accepted a recommendation from Intrado in July and has established the Emergency Services Messaging Interface Task Force (Task Force 34) to drive the effort. The task force will operate within the Emergency Services Interconnection Forum, a group co-convened by ATIS and the National Emergency Number Association.

Calling the connectivity between public safety answering points (PSAPs), the 911 infrastructure and callers a "pretty archaic interchange," Stephen Meer, co-founder and chief technology officer at Intrado, said the original paradigm for 911 needs an

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overhaul that goes beyond recommendations defined by the NENA Future Path Plan.

NENA, which has a mission of fostering technological advancement and implementation of a universal emergency telephony system, has put forth its own set of recommendations in a document called the "NENA Technical Information Document on Future 9-1-1 Models."

"However, it's not an ANSI-accredited standards body," Meer said. "This is a broader telephony datacom issue, and given ATIS' history in inter-carrier messaging, we thought it made more sense to go to them."

The new messaging protocol would enhance the amount of data that comes with each call into a PSAP. Today, that message contains less than 500 bytes of information. Standard protocols also would make it easier to add new attributes or make changes without impacting the availability of the emergency network.

"It's important for public safety to be able to move the system forward but not put people at risk while doing it," Meer said.

Wireless E-911 and the emerging issues around VoIP are good examples of the systems' inflexibility. "There will always be something new. We also have to be able to adapt even to what comes after VoIP, whatever that might be," Meer said.

Intrado has a protocol in development but did not submit the work as part of the ATIS recommendation. Instead, the recommendation focuses on critical success factors that define the capabilities of an ultimate standard protocol.

"There will undoubtedly be that battle [between competing protocols] when we get to that point, but my vision is that as long as the protocol takes us to a dramatically higher playing field, my needs will be met. It doesn't have to be my protocol or I lose," Meer said.

That's the beauty of developing standards within ESIF, said Ed Hall, vice president of technology development at ATIS. "There is a wide cross-section of interests present, including PSAP vendors, equipment vendors, and representatives of local exchange carriers and wireless [operators]. So the end product will already be somewhat validated."

ATIS hopes have the standard solid enough to send out to the industry for ballot by the first quarter of 2005. Once the issues raised by balloting are addressed, the protocol can be used as a standard and vendors can begin building their interpretations of new PSAP interfaces, Hall said.

A senior representative from both ATIS and NENA will be part of the ESIF management team. "We stay very well coordinated with the technical activities



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taking place at NENA," Hall said. 'If we don't, we would be duplicating efforts and draining the resources of the industry.'

Mike Fargano, industry standards coordinator for Qwest, and Mike Nelson, vice president of software engineering for Intrado, will act as co-chairmen of Task Force 34.

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