

Examination of Montana's 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System

9-1-1 is the universal number in the U.S. providing access to emergency services. The 1985 Legislature delegated to the Department of Administration (department) responsibility for oversight and monitoring of a state system. This report discusses changes the department and legislature can make to improve and enhance 9-1-1 services for today and tomorrow.

Audit Findings

Public safety answering points (PSAPs) are generally responsible for answering 9-1-1 calls and dispatching emergency services. Montana has 57 PSAPs operated by county or city governments. To help local governments implement, operate, and maintain 9-1-1 services, the legislature levied surcharges on each telephone access line. As of November 2007, the 9-1-1 surcharges are \$1.00 per access line per month. We conclude the department has met its statutory obligations for assisting PSAPs, distributing program funds to counties, and monitoring system development.

In addition to looking at department oversight and monitoring activities, audit objectives addressed uses of surcharge revenues and department authority for ensuring 9-1-1 services are deployed efficiently and effectively. We believe the department and legislature should re-examine the 9-1-1 system in light of technological changes and system status. The following findings illustrate why we believe the program needs modification.

- Statute does not give the department clear authority to set standards and direct program activities to ensure standardization and minimum statewide services in a rapidly evolving 9-1-1 system.
- Some PSAPs have accumulated relatively large reserves from surcharge revenues; however, statute is unclear on how PSAPs may use these program funds.
- A mathematical oversight in state law results in inequities in the distribution of program funds to PSAPs.
- Some counties have expended program funds for administrative or indirect costs before deploying current 9-1-1 technologies.
- The department has minimal management information for program oversight and reporting purposes.
- Department documentation suggests some PSAPs have insufficient call volumes to justify being stand-alone PSAPs, and consolidation would increase efficiencies without jeopardizing 9-1-1 service.

Audit Recommendations

Audit recommendations in Chapter III are directed to the department and address seeking statutory change to the funding distribution methodology, and improving the department's collection and compilation of management information. Chapter IV presents recommendations directly to the legislature regarding clarifying use of program funds, 9-1-1 services provided in the state, and increasing department authority to oversee and direct statewide 9-1-1 activities. We also recommend the legislature revise how unused 9-1-1 funds deposited in the General Fund are expended.