

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

Introduction

Background

In 1972, Canada recognized the three-digit telephone number "911" as the "Universal Emergency Number," for citizens to request emergency assistance. The number is a nationwide telephone number that gives the public fast and easy access to a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) where the PSAP answers and routes the callers to the appropriate emergency responders.

The 911 service allows individuals to dial one three digit number to access any emergency services including medical, fire and police. Without the 911 service, an individual would have to either know or find the applicable emergency number and dial up to eleven digits to access these services.

In 1976, the Province first introduced the 911 service in the St. John's region. Currently 15 communities in the Northeast Avalon area have access to this service. All calls for this service are currently routed through the St. John's Fire Department.

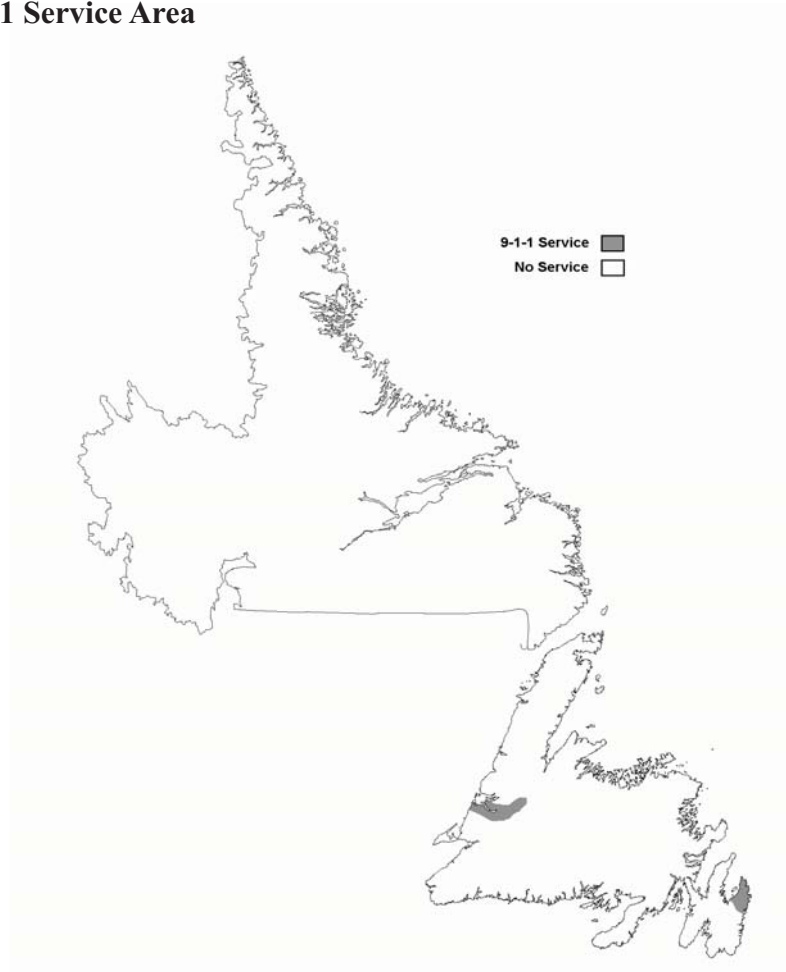
In 1988, the 911 service was introduced on the west coast of the Province. Currently, 23 communities in the Corner Brook/Humber Valley/Bay of Islands area have access to this service. All calls for this service are currently routed through the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary in Corner Brook.

Figure 1 shows the area covered by the land based 911 service in the Province.

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

Figure 1

911 Service Area



Audit Objective and Scope

Objective

The objective of our review was to assess the adequacy of the coverage of the land based 911 emergency response service in the Province.

Scope

We completed our review in November 2005. Our review included an examination of various Government reports and discussions with officials at the Emergency Measures Organization.

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

Conclusions

No Province-wide 911 service

Newfoundland and Labrador is the only Atlantic Province without Province-wide coverage for land based 911 emergency response services. Currently, only 40% of the Province's population and less than 10% of communities on the island portion of the Province have access to this 911 service. Furthermore, there is no land based 911 service in Labrador.

The 911 services currently operating in the Province are “basic” 911 services. In contrast, the other Atlantic Provinces have “enhanced” 911 services which use the telephone number of the calling party to capture information related to the location of the emergency. This is particularly significant where the caller's ability to communicate is impaired.

Without a 911 service, individuals can experience delays in contacting the appropriate emergency service since they have to either know or find the emergency number and dial up to eleven digits to contact emergency services in their area. There is an added risk for the traveling public who may not be aware that there is no land based Province-wide 911 service.

Findings and Recommendation

Benefits of a 911 service

A 911 emergency response service allows callers to access emergency services such as medical, fire and police by dialing one standard three digit number - 911.

Coverage area

There is no Province-wide coverage for 911 services from land based telephone lines.

In 1976 the first land based 911 service was introduced in the Province in the Northeast Avalon region. Currently 15 communities in this region have access to this service. In 1988, a land based 911 service was introduced on the west coast of the Province. Currently, 23 communities in the Corner Brook/Humber Valley/ Bay of Islands area have access to this 911 service. The following table gives a summary of the communities and population with access to this 911 service.

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

Land Based 911 Emergency Response Service Coverage

Area	Communities	Percentage of Communities	Public Safety Answering Point	Population	Percentage of Population
Northeast Avalon (Appendix A)	15	2%	St. Johns Fire Department	173,000	34%
Corner Brook/ Humber Valley/ Bay of Islands (Appendix B)	23	4%	RNC Corner Brook	32,000	6%
Remainder of Province	567	94%	No service	308,000	60%
Total	605	100%		513,000	100%

Issues with current land based 911 service

We have identified the following issues with regard to the current land based 911 service coverage in the Province:

- As the table shows, only 40% of the Province's population and 6% of the communities currently have access to this 911 service;
- This 911 service is only available to certain communities on the island portion of the Province and there is no land based 911 service available to any communities in Labrador;
- Newfoundland and Labrador is the only Atlantic Province without Province-wide access to a land based 911 service;
- The 911 services currently operating in the Province are “basic” 911 services. In contrast, the other Atlantic Provinces have “enhanced” 911 services which use the telephone number of the calling party to capture information related to the location of the emergency. This is particularly significant where the caller's ability to communicate is impaired.

Therefore, in this Province a caller must provide directions as to the location of the emergency and the person at the Public Safety Answering Point is required to have knowledge of the area in order to relay the directions to the applicable emergency service provider. As a result, there is an increased risk that an emergency response may be either unnecessarily delayed or sent to an incorrect location.

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

- Without a 911 service, individuals can experience delays in contacting the appropriate emergency service since they have to either know or find the emergency number and dial up to eleven digits to contact emergency services in their area. There is an added risk for the traveling public who may not be aware that there is no land based Province-wide 911 service.

Issues with current cellular telephone 911 service

Officials of the Emergency Measures Organization informed us that all cellular telephones in the Province can access a 911 answering service, if the cellular telephone is in a service area. From Channel-Port aux Basques to Newman Sound in Terra Nova National Park, calls would be routed to the Corner Brook/Humber Valley/Bay of Islands 911 answering service. East of Newman Sound and on the Burin Peninsula, calls would be routed to the St. John's Fire Department 911 answering service. Cellular telephone calls to 911 placed in Labrador would also be routed to the St. John's Fire Department 911 answering service. With regards to access to a 911 service via cellular telephone we note the following:

- It is not promoted publicly because of the limitations in highway signage and the lack of addressing within the Province;
- Not everybody has access to a cellular telephone;
- It has never been formally tested to confirm the exact coverage - not all areas within the Province have cellular telephone coverage; and
- It is still only a “basic” 911 service.

Cabinet review

In 1993, Cabinet appointed a committee to review the current 911 services operating within the Province and to make recommendations in relation to a Province-wide service. This committee reviewed the technical requirements, cost options, time frames for implementation and the method of implementation. The committee found that it was technically possible to implement a 911 service Province-wide.

In 1995, Cabinet approved, in principle, the establishment of a Province-wide 911 emergency response service. It established another committee to consider options for the operation of such a service, location of the service centre and funding levels required.

In 1996, Cabinet deferred its decision to implement the Province-wide service and to date no progress has been made in implementing a Province-wide 911 service.

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

Operating costs

In 1993, the Cabinet appointed committee determined that the net increase in operating costs for a Province-wide 911 service would be approximately \$550,000, bringing the total annual costs to approximately \$910,000.

In 2005, officials at the Emergency Measures Organization office indicated that the cost to operate the two existing land based 911 services was in excess of \$800,000.

There is currently no information available as to either the current cost of implementing a Province-wide land based 911 service or the cost of operating such a service.

Recommendation

The Province should consider whether a Province-wide land based 911 emergency response service should be implemented.

Department’s Response

The Department of Municipal Affairs is aware of the previous reports and work done on the province wide 911 emergency response service (E-911) initiative. There continues to be calls from private industry and others to proceed with the implementation of such a service and this department continues to respond to the expressions of interest for the service.

In responding to inquiries, the Department has indicated that the concept of an E-911 system is valid and the department supports the concept. However more research and associated work has to be completed before an E-911 system can be implemented. Specifically, the matter of civic addressing must be fully completed in order for the system to be effective. At this time this is not complete, and is seen as a major impediment to successfully implementing the service. Secondly the organization of the various emergency services to properly receive the emergency calls and respond appropriately will require upgrading. The costs associated to address the aforementioned are projected to be substantial. A cost projection done in 1996 suggested that the implementation of such an E-911 system could reach as much as \$10 million.

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

It is the opinion and finding of the Fire Commissioner/Director of Newfoundland and Labrador Emergency Measures Organization that most of the public residing in our province are familiar with the emergency services within their geographic area, they recognize the travel distances required to access the services, and most importantly they know the various telephone numbers to contact the required services.

The Department of Municipal Affairs will continue to monitor the call for such a service and respond accordingly. If direction is made by government to review the initiative, an appropriate committee will be struck to address the matter and make appropriate recommendations.

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

Appendix A Communities with Access to a 911 Service Northeast Avalon

	Community	Population
1.	Bauline	364
2.	Bay Bulls	1,014
3.	Conception Bay South	19,772
4.	Flatrock	1,138
5.	Logy Bay Middle Cove Outer Cove	1,872
6.	Mount Pearl	24,964
7.	Paradise	9,598
	<i>Petty Harbour Maddox Cove</i>	
8.	Petty Harbour	949
9.	Maddox Cove	
	<i>Portugal Cove St. Phillips</i>	
10.	Portugal Cove	5,866
11.	St. Phillips	
12.	Pouch Cove	1,669
13.	St. Johns	99,182
14.	Torbay	5,474
15.	Witless Bay	1,056
	Total	172,918

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service

Appendix B Communities with Access to a 911 Service Corner Brook/Humber Valley/Bay of Islands

	Community	Population
1.	Corner Brook	20,103
2.	Coxs Cove	719
3.	Georges Lake	43
4.	Gillams	406
5.	Hughes Brook	188
	<i>Humber Arm South</i>	
6.	Benoits Cove	
7.	Frenchmens Cove	1,800
8.	Halfway Point	
9.	Johns Beach	
10.	Humber Village	120
	<i>Irishtown - Summerside</i>	
11.	Irishtown	1,304
12.	Summerside	
13.	Lark Harbour	613
14.	Little Rapids	201
15.	Massey Drive	770
16.	McIvers	571
17.	Meadows	676
18.	Mount Moriah	700
	<i>Pasadena</i>	
19.	Pasadena	3,133
20.	South Brook	
21.	Pinchgut Lake	24
22.	Steady Brook	394
23.	York Harbour	388
	Total	32,153

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada

2.19 “911” Emergency Response Service
