

**Emergency Services Communication**  
**in**  
**North Dakota**  
**A Status Report**  
**June 27, 2006**

**Prepared by the**  
**Public Safety Answering Points Committee**

**Pursuant to:**  
**NDCC 57-40.6-12**

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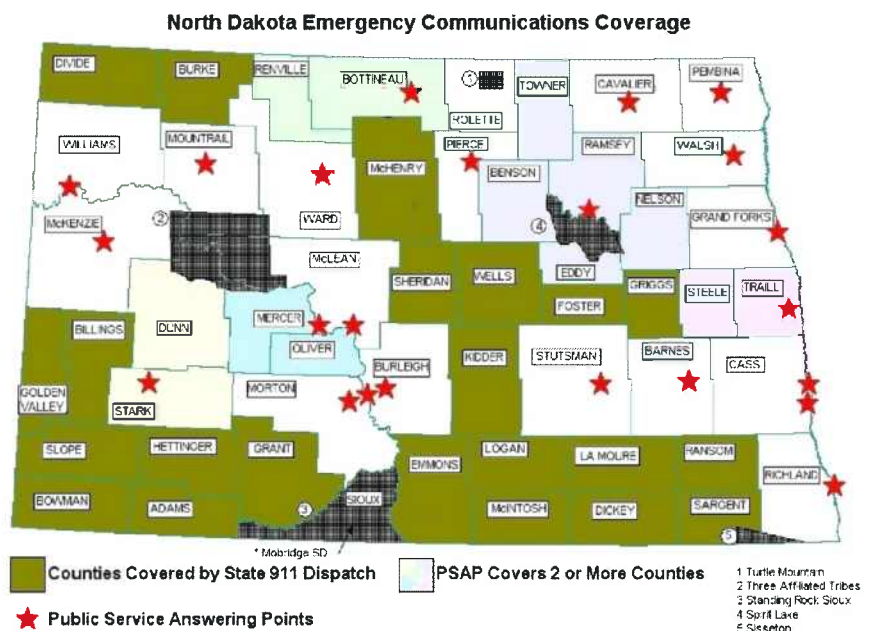
## Purpose

The Legislature, in 2001, enacted a new section of North Dakota Century Code (57-40.6-12) that establishes a “*public safety answering points committee*” and creates for the committee a reporting requirement concerning the compiled “*income, expenditures, and status*” information of the individual emergency services communication systems (ESCS) of the State. Appendix A contains the statute and composition of the committee. This report constitutes the committee’s 2006 report, and is being submitted as requested by the Legislative Council to the Electric Industry Competition Committee.

## Background

Emergency services communication is a complex and multi-faceted system of telephones, computers, and radios that connects every citizen of the State to law enforcement, fire departments, and emergency medical responders through 23 public safety answering points (PSAPs) in North Dakota and one in South Dakota. While from one perspective this network can be viewed as 24 separate systems, it is in reality a single system with 24 points of contact.

Emergency services communication has existed in this State since the development of telephone and radio; however it became more accessible, reliable, and consistent with the advent of E-911. E-911 refers to the policies, procedures, and technologies that allow immediate connection to the appropriate PSAP from almost any phone in the State by dialing the digits 9-1-1; and the ultimate dispatch of the most appropriate and available emergency service. The integration of these policies, procedures, and technologies has been partially funded through a 911 fee levied on phone service in the State. As of November, 2002, 52 counties and 4 cities have imposed such fees.



Only Rolette County does not currently levy this fee, and therefore does not yet have true E-911 services. The voters of Rolette County however have approved the fee, they have just completed a countywide addressing project, and a cooperative agreement for joint dispatch with the Bureau of Indian Affairs is being negotiated.

Obviously with 56 governing bodies imposing fees but only 24 PSAPs, there is considerable sharing of services. 22 of the counties are served by the PSAP operated by State Radio, five are jointly dispatched by the Lake Region Law Enforcement Center, and five other two-unit PSAPs exist. A complete listing is attached to this report as Appendix B. This Appendix also indicates the jurisdictions and approximate population served by each PSAP.

It is often of interest to compare North Dakota to neighboring states in the area of emergency services communication. The table contrasts the number of PSAPs operated in the surrounding states with their population. North Dakota falls just about in the middle of the group with respect to number of persons served per PSAP,

<b>Rank</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Total Number of PSAP's</b>	<b>Population 2000 Census</b>	<b>Persons Served Per PSAP</b>
1	Wyoming	34	493,782	14,523
2	Montana	57	902,195	15,828
3	South Dakota	33	754,844	22,874
4	Idaho	55	1,293,953	23,526
<b>5</b>	<b>North Dakota</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>642,200</b>	<b>27,922</b>
6	Kansas	83	2,688,418	32,391
7	Iowa	84	2,926,324	34,837
8	Minnesota	111	4,919,479	44,320

but has the fewest PSAPs of any State in the region.

North Dakota law (NDCC 57-40.6) allows city and county governing bodies to impose a “fee that does not exceed one dollar per month per telephone access line and per wireless access line” for the support of an “*emergency services communications system*”. Additionally, through home rule powers, counties can impose such a fee within the limits of their home rule charter. Two cities have used their home rule authority for this purpose. Of the governing bodies that have imposed a fee through the statutory provisions or their own home rule powers, all are currently levying a dollar.

It is very important to note, as this report will show, Emergency Services Communications is much broader than simply E-911. While dialing 911 most often initiates the emergency response, the day-by-day, hour-by-hour communications between dispatchers and responders, the ongoing contact during an emergency, the location information, mapping software, faxes, and numerous other components make it possible for local emergency services to arrive and deliver services in the shortest time possible.

## Methodology

To prepare this report, a survey of all 911 jurisdictions was conducted, and additional information was gathered through the statewide efforts to implement 911 services for wireless (cellular) and voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) communications.

The survey focused first on the revenues and expenditures of the 56 entities that have imposed a 911 fee. This was compiled in a manner that attempted to preclude counting revenue twice in situations where a county contracts with another entity for emergency communication services. Calendar year 2005 revenue and expenditure data was requested and received from all 911 jurisdictions. The actual results from both the “PSAP” and “Contract” entities are attached to this report as Appendix C. A number of entities qualified their revenue data with notes regarding grant awards, general fund deposits, and miscellaneous refunds that, in addition to fee revenue, were deposited in their special funds during 2005 to meet ESCS costs.

The survey was also designed to assess the level of activity, staffing, and current operational status of the 23 PSAPs in North Dakota. (The South Dakota PSAP serving Sioux County was not surveyed.) This information is generally more qualitative in nature, and relies on averages and estimates.

## Status - Financial

The financial data indicated several significant changes since the last survey. For the first time on a statewide basis, the revenue received by local jurisdictions from wireless (cellular) communication companies exceeded that received from landline companies. This trend does not hold true for every jurisdiction, however the more urban jurisdictions all have more wireless revenue than landline.



This shift also has implications on the operation of emergency services communication systems, as you will see in the operational data.

When analyzing the revenues and expenditures from the special fund created by the statutory and home rule fees, many jurisdictions point out that there are significant costs of supporting their systems borne by other funds, but that these costs are not reflected in the special fund transactions. Salaries and (particularly) benefits for dispatchers are often funded through local city or county property tax sources.

Appendix C contains the actual data gathered from the individual jurisdictional reports; however the following table and charts provide a statewide picture of the finances. The reports have been grouped by “State Radio” and “Non-State Radio” dispatched counties, and some grouping of expenditure categories has been done to make the charts more meaningful.

	State Radio Dispatched Jurisdictions	Non-State Radio Dispatched Jurisdictions
2005 Landline Revenue	\$ 461,416	\$ 3,188,102
2005 Wireless Revenue	\$ 450,073	\$ 3,587,599
ESCS Expenditures – Current Year	\$ 751,154	\$ 6,348,528
Dedicated Reserves–Equip. Upgrade	\$ 160,345	\$ 427,174
Difference	\$ 0	\$ 0

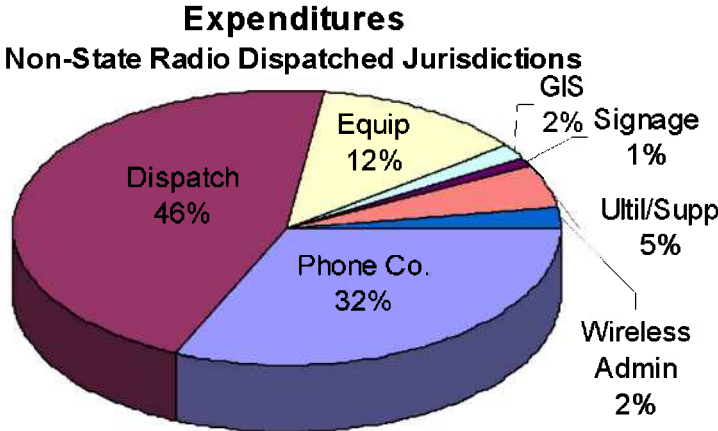
ESCS – Emergency Services Communications Systems (NDCC 57-40.6)

Although, on a statewide basis in CY2005, revenues were sufficient to place funds in dedicated reserves for equipment upgrades, the situation was reversed in a third of the individual jurisdictions, as purchases for equipment upgrades and signage projects resulted in significant expenditures and negative balances.

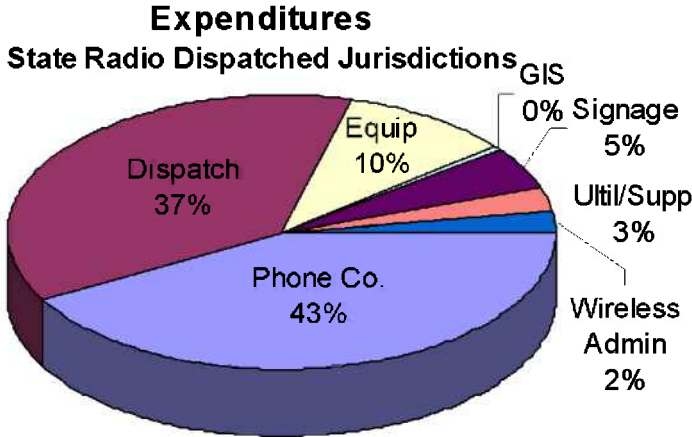
Some of the jurisdictions also included notes regarding major purchases they are anticipating in 2006 or 2007. As an example, Grand Forks indicated a \$1.3 million upgrade to an interoperable radio system that will be paid for over the next three years, with some of the funds coming from this revenue source. Several counties are also in the planning/contracting phase of significant GIS mapping projects. The data documents the prudent planning for strategic expenditures that was envisioned by the Legislature when this special revenue source was created.

In the next two charts, to facilitate comparison between the two types of jurisdictions, the category “Dispatch” includes direct

salaries and benefits paid to staff (including the 911 coordinator) as well as payments made to other jurisdictions for contract dispatch. The “Equip” category includes both the purchase of towers, dispatch consoles, computers, base stations, etc. as well as the ongoing maintenance of this equipment. The “Phone Co.” category includes payments for voice and data trunks as well as the portion of the wireless project fees that are paid for data base services and selective routing on behalf of the wireless carriers.



While there are obvious differences between the relative expenditures of State-radio and non-State radio dispatched jurisdictions, it is significant that these differences are actually quite small.



The detailed information (Appendix C) shows variation among individual jurisdictions in how these special funds are used – something noted in the recent performance audit of this funding source. While all expenditures appear to clearly fall within the statutory requirement of supporting “emergency services communication systems”, an effort is underway to develop

