



### The City of Minneapolis Relies on 311 Call Center for Disaster Preparedness and Response: the I-35W Bridge Collapse

With the advent of 311 call centers, local governments are changing the way their communities are served. Initially designed to off-load non-emergency calls from 911 services and provide better access to government services, 311 call centers have become increasingly sophisticated in the services they offer. Enthusiastic citizen response and increasing reliance on 311 has expanded the role of these call centers from a gateway to day-to-day government services to a disaster preparedness and response center in times of crisis.

On August 1, 2007, the City of Minneapolis leveraged its 311 call center to help respond to one of the City's worst tragedies – the I-35W bridge collapse.

The City of Minneapolis had launched its 311 call center on January 4, 2006 in an effort to better serve its community of more than 400,000 residents. The consolidated call center, Lagan 311™, provides Minneapolis residents with a single point of access to a range of city services, including Public Works, Regulatory Services, Community Planning and Economic Development, Animal Control, Police, Fire and Human Resources. The 311 call center also alleviates the problem of excess, non-emergency call volume into the city's 911 call center, thereby keeping the line open for truly life-threatening events that require immediate response.

Citizens can choose their preferential communication channel – telephone, face-to-face, email, internet, fax -- to interact with the City. The solution creates a detailed record for every contact, including key milestones tracked by agency-defined service level agreements, to provide a clear escalation path and improve agency responsiveness and accountability.

By all accounts the Call Center had established a track record of success and was exceeding customer service expectations when it was put to a serious test. At 6:05 p.m. on August 1, 2007 the City received its first 911 call and at 6:06 p.m. calls began to come into the 311 call center. Concerned citizens were inquiring about power failures, traffic signal outages and other traffic-related issues. By 6:11 p.m. first responders were at the scene. At 6:20 the media initiated coverage and the City's Emergency Operations Center (ECO) was activated. Initial reports broke the news that the I-35W Bridge – a main cross-city connector for more than 140,000 vehicles a day, measuring 1,900 feet in length with a main span of 458 feet – had collapsed during rush hour. Dozens of vehicles were in the water and the number of deaths and injuries were as yet unknown.

For the next hour and half the 311 center was flooded with calls outside the normal scope – inquiries from national media outlets such as NBC New York and families and friends trying to track down injured loved ones. By 7:55 p.m. all the survivors had been removed from the scene through an incredibly swift orchestration by emergency response teams. But a very long night was ahead. 311 emergency staffing shifts began at 6:45 p.m. and normal hours (7 AM – 11 PM, Monday – Friday) were extended to midnight.

#### Within the first year of using Lagan 311, the City of Minneapolis had:

- Answered 343,428 calls
- Created 61,720 cases with Lagan 311
- Improved first-call resolution from 60% to 72%
- Increased the contact center service level for the year to 90.3% / 20 seconds

LAGAN

Connecting Governments and People

The next day the 311 call center opened at 6:00 a.m. and plans were put in place to stay open through the weekend. During the first few days of the emergency the City's 911 call volume more than tripled. A total of 505 bridge-collapse related calls came into 911 within the first two hours with 51 of those calls from people at the scene. Meanwhile, 311 call volume doubled. A video monitoring system provided 311 call operators with real-time information from the scene and the city website directed all media to call 311 for information.

The City's EOC remained opened 24 hours/day for the first four days and 12 hours/day through August 17. In the days immediately following the disaster the public learned that 13 deaths and 86 injuries resulted from the collapse. The EOC stayed in the "ready position" until the last body was recovered on August 20.

During this time the 311 call center remained in constant contact with the EOC, escalating urgent non-emergency issues to them while handling a bevy of issues for which new support systems had quickly been put into place. The 311 center extended its ability to address and track a range of service requests and had clear processes in place and information available to respond to media requests, offers for donations, offers for fee-based services, eyewitness reports, victim/injured lists, missing persons, missing vehicles, personal property and expressions of condolences/thanks, traffic information and disaster site information. At the same time, the call center had to continue support the majority of the City's residents for whom it was business as usual.

"I was extremely proud of our call center staff for swinging into immediate action and for working with diligence and the utmost professionalism during such a devastating time in our city's history" said Don Stickney, 311 Call Center Manager for the City of Minneapolis. "The flexibility of the Lagan 311 solution, coupled with the proficiency of our call center team, enabled us to adapt our system quickly to address the far-ranging and urgent requests that we faced. In the wake of this tragedy, we are reminded that we have only begun to tap into the power of our call center and feel so incredibly fortunate that the communication channels were solidly in place for our citizens on that horrific day. Based on lessons learned, we're expanding our knowledge base and continuously updating it with the latest best practices, processes and information so that our 311 agents will be even better equipped to serve the citizens of great city.

The City of Minneapolis serves as a model for others in the handling of disasters. The coordinated response between 311, 911, EOC and other outside agencies resulted in distribution of consistent, quality information; the ability to focus resources on where they could help most; quick response to emergencies; and the ability to return to pre-disaster call levels quickly. In addition, the ability to track information as it was happening streamlined reporting to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and ensured compliance for budget recovery.

At the same time, the City has learned a tremendous amount through responding to this disaster that it is incorporating into its disaster preparedness planning. During times of crisis the 311 call center becomes a "defacto" public information office. The City website was not able to keep pace with the changing information. Processes have been defined and an inventory of information is being maintained and shared between the two offices to ensure timely and accurate information is disseminated to the media and the public.

An "emergency incident" knowledge base community is being created to ensure the right people have access to the right information in times of disaster. A process and team have been put in place to ensure information remains current. In addition, a battery of service request types is being developed in an attempt to anticipate every conceivable request. Finally, additional processes have been established to ensure the well being of the 311 call center staff during times of crisis.

“As important as processes, technology and knowledge are to excellent service delivery, you can't lose site of the fact that the people answering the phones are the lynchpin to the success of any 311 call center;” adds Stickney. “In times of crisis they need special attention too. By taking care of our staff, they were able to take care of the community with a level of commitment, compassion and calm that was truly remarkable.”

209 Airport Road West  
Belfast  
Co. Antrim  
Northern Ireland  
BT3 9EZ

Wessex House  
Oxford Road  
Newbury  
England  
RG14 1PA

Two Democracy Center  
6903 Rockledge Drive  
Suite 920  
Bethesda, MD 20817  
U.S.A.

200 West Jackson Boulevard  
Suite 1350  
Chicago, IL 60606  
U.S.A.

T: 44 (0) 28 9078 8300  
F: 44 (0) 28 9078 8339  
E: [info@lagan.com](mailto:info@lagan.com)

T: 44 (0) 1635 814456  
F: 44 (0) 1635 814402  
E: [info@lagan.com](mailto:info@lagan.com)

T: 301-263-6240  
F: 301-263-6280  
E: [info\\_us@lagan.com](mailto:info_us@lagan.com)

T: 312-291-4176  
F: 312-291-4235  
E: [info\\_us@lagan.com](mailto:info_us@lagan.com)

Registered Name: Lagan Technologies Ltd  
Registered Office: 209 Airport Road West

Place of Registration: Belfast  
Registration Number: NI28773

Lagan 311 is a trademark of Lagan Technologies Ltd

[www.lagan.com](http://www.lagan.com)

[www.twitter.com/lagan\\_business](https://www.twitter.com/lagan_business)