

Construction offers test of contingency plans

Ongoing construction at the Richmond Emergency Communications Center provided an opportunity to test contingency plans for 911 call-taking and dispatch on May 30.

Some communications officers with the Richmond Department of Emergency Communications (DEC) worked in alternate locations on May 30. The move was needed to ensure the safety of employees, while roofing trusses were being installed to join the existing building to the training center under construction.

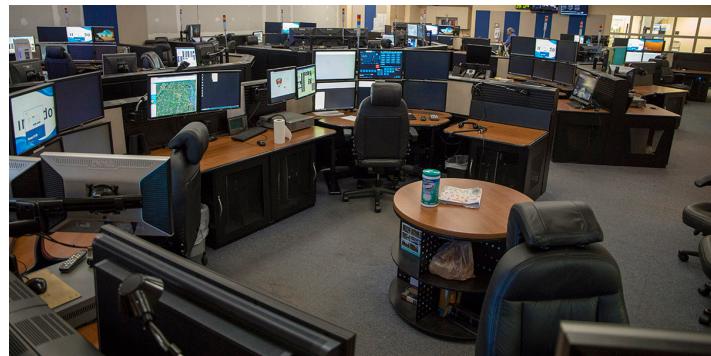
“We’re using an abundance of precaution to protect the safety of our highly skilled employees, while continuing to protect the safety and well-being of the residents of Richmond,” said Stephen Willoughby, director and chief of the DEC.

Willoughby said the move caused only minor issues that were handled by employees on duty. No disruption or change in capability or services affected the public or the first responders.

DEC staff are working with the construction staff to address leaking in the operations floor as a result of the work, which is continuing on schedule to be completed by October, Willoughby said.

About 15 communications officers plus some supervisors worked in alternate locations within the DEC, 6 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on May 30. Others worked in their normal locations, while some worked in Henrico County Emergency Communications Center.

DEC’s technology division set up virtual private networks that communications officers used to remotely access Richmond’s computer-aided dispatch system while working in Henrico County’s center.



A rare empty operations floor on May 30.



Operations Manager Felicia Roane checks on operations in the training room on May 30.

The changes brought by construction also provided a real-life opportunity for DEC to exercise its city-required continuity of operations plan. The plan covers how the department would remain operational during many possible scenarios in which access to the building or equipment is restricted, major equipment and systems malfunction, or substantial numbers of workers are out.

These plans have been tested several other times since DEC became a department separate from the Police Department on July 1, 2014, Willoughby said. Primarily because of major equipment upgrades, these past real-life exercises also have involved having Richmond communications officers work in Henrico. Reciprocating, Henrico County communications officers also have worked in Richmond’s Emergency Communications Center before.