

Police set to log on - next week

By Paul Wellersdick

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A new computer system at the Paradise Police Department will launch next week opening an online public portal into crime activity, while improving officer safety and saving time with a robust records management database.

The department is in the midst of training now, and on Feb. 22 it will flick the ceremonious switch converting to a new \$383,000 computer upgrade police say has been long overdue. From the public perspective, this means anyone will be able to view online maps of crimes, traffic collisions or anything else police respond to. The public will also gain access to digital police logs - a first for the Paradise Police Department.

Also, members of the public will be able to create layered maps showing different types of crime by neighborhood, RIMS Sun Ridge Systems Inc. sales director Betsy McNutt said. Pulling up a map of a current Bay Area client, McNutt showed how one of the company's 100 California clients is using a similar system that allows for custom crime searches.

For those without computers, Paradise police's new system also includes a touch-screen computer at the station for public access to logs

and maps in town. Media will also have access to new digital logs rather than cumbersome paper trails run through fax machines. In the computer world, machines are outdated every few years. But the town's dispatching and records system is 20 years old and failing.

It is at a critical stage, becoming costly and impossible to repair, Police Chief

Chris Buzzard said, while profusely thanking the Paradise Town Council for its support of replacing the relatively ancient system. While the project is expensive, parts of it were paid for by grants and donations. The cost also included months of site visits from the company and weeks of training and technical support, Buzzard said.

"We felt that training was not a place to skimp," he said. "and we feel it's paid off."

Another part of the technological upgrade is the \$83,000 addition of 12 laptop computers or mobile data terminals to be installed in police cruisers. This upgrade was made possible by a \$50,000 bequest. By the end of the month, those computers will be connected via a secure wireless connection to new servers, or data systems at the station. They will also be fed information by dispatchers using a new computer aided dispatching system.

While on the way to a stabbing or robbery, for example, police will receive mug shots, suspect names, locations and any other officer safety concerns - all directly to a laptop. With the

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current system, police rely nearly entirely on radio traffic to relay information. Officers do use cell phones too, which the new system will have the ability to tie into, Buzzard said, adding that the system is upgradeable and expandable to keep current with technology, something the old system is incapable of. The in-car laptops also have global positioning system compatibility, so officers and dispatchers will always know where the nearest officer is or where the closest backup is.

That information will be available with real-time mapping showing where each officer is. These computers will also allow officers to file reports from the field, keeping them visible on the streets rather than at the station doing paperwork, Buzzard said.

The CAD system will handle all 9-1-1 calls coming into the police and fire departments as well as any non-emergency calls to the police station. While taking calls, dispatchers multi-task, keeping an eye on security camera feeds, several computer monitors and foot traffic into the station. Dispatchers handle all that while radioing police officers and firefighters in the field.

The dispatching room never sleeps either, running full-steam 24 hours a day seven days a week, but with the upgrade dispatchers will spend half as much time entering redundant data which will now be automated by the system, PPD Communications Supervisor Lillian Booth said.

Another advantage of the new systems will be the department's increased ability to triangulate and locate 9-1-1 callers' positions. All these features help the department maximize a small staff, Buzzard said. At 16 officers, Paradise police has fewer today than it did two years ago, he said.

The town council recently approved the department to hire two replacement officers in anticipation of a series of retirements and lateral moves to other departments, such as the California Highway Patrol. CHP officers and many more urban departments already use such systems, including mobile computers. All the officers The Post has talked with agree the upgrade is a positive step and brings the department to current police standards.