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## VoIP: Coppin State Solves Its 911 Dilemma

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**CIO** By Stephanie Overby

Dr. Ahmed El-Haggan is one enthusiastic early adopter. Since taking over as CIO of Coppin State University in 1999, he charged ahead with efforts to make the school the first in the University System of Maryland to go wireless. He pioneered the digital recording of lectures and introduced a smartphone-friendly version of the university's website.

But it was his first embrace of emerging technology at Coppin State that stands as his biggest, boldest move: A three-year project to replace the institution's crumbling IT backbone with a cutting-edge [converged IP infrastructure](#). That move made Coppin State one of the first voice-over-IP campuses in the country in 2001. (See "[An Office Anywhere](#).")

Unfortunately, it also created a serious safety issue. While IP telephony users could move their phone to another outlet and get a dial tone on the network instantly, there was no way to locate that user in real time. So if a student or professor called 911, the operator would see the school's main address, no matter where the call originated.

This is a problem facing many organizations with centralized telecommunications systems-traditional, IP-enabled or otherwise-with the added uncertainty of these truly mobile landlines. By some estimates, [as many as 60 million Americans](#) are at risk if they dial 911 but cannot provide exact details of their locations to dispatchers.

When Workarounds Don't WorkIn its first effort to overcome the issue, Coppin State mandated that all emergency calls be directed to campus police, who would collect location information and call 911. But phone users instinctively called 911 directly during a crisis, so fire trucks and ambulances were routinely parked at the university entrance trying figure out where to go. El-Haggan himself broke his own rules and direct-dialed 911 when someone in his office appeared to be suffering a stroke.

What made this CIO finally take action to find an IT solution was an April 2006 incident-unrelated to the university-in which a Maryland man was found dead in his office 10 hours after calling 911. Misdirected by the company's phone system, rescuers had gone to the wrong address.

El-Haggan found the answer to his 911 angst in a network tool. Coppin State had implemented eTelemetry's Locate appliance in 2007 to provide an automated, centralized view of its network.

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The tool allowed IT to tie a log-in name to a port, and that real-time data enabled El-Haggan's team to quickly [troubleshoot network problems remotely](#).

Working with engineers and project managers from eTelemetry, Avaya and Presidio Networked Solutions, El-Haggan spent around \$90,000 to consolidate 2,500 handsets in one Avaya server. In January, he rolled out an enhanced 911 system. Now when someone calls 911, the dispatcher sees the caller's accurate location information, including the building's address and which floor and area of that floor the call was placed from. Public safety simultaneously gets the same information, including a link to the building's floor plan.

The ROI has far exceeded expectations, but Coppin State is not measuring the payoff in dollars.

"Imagine you save one person's life. How much money is that worth?" says El-Haggan. "Sometimes people's decisions are driven by regulatory and compliance issues. If there's not a law, they don't pay attention to it. That's the wrong attitude. We wanted to do what was right, period."

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Original story - 593674

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