



From Data to Information to Action During COVID-19



At a Glance

Upon the emergence of COVID-19 in the United States, leaders in Jackson County, Oregon, took quick action to set up automated surveillance of its 911 and EMS data. Here are just a few of the examples of how county fire, EMS, 911, and public health officials used FirstWatch to keep a close eye on the status of the emergency system and some of the new programs implemented to fight the pandemic.

Surge Awareness:

When the county's overall fire and EMS call volume exceeded certain thresholds established by county leaders, FirstWatch alerted them immediately by text and email so they could determine the cause of the increase and whether additional resources were needed.

COVID-19 Monitoring:

FirstWatch scoured dispatch information looking for certain call types or notes in the CAD narrative indicating a potential COVID-19 patient, alerting leadership without disrupting the call center's workflow or operations.

Nurse Triage Notification:

As soon as a dispatcher recorded comments in the CAD indicating a caller had been transferred to the nurse triage hotline, responding units were automatically notified.

Fire District 3 in Jackson County, Oregon, rapidly implemented new programs, policies, and technology to keep residents and first responders safe when COVID-19 arrived

Background

Like communities across the country, Jackson County, Oregon was bracing for coronavirus. Although a largely rural community, the county is bisected by Interstate 5 and sits almost exactly halfway between San Francisco and Seattle, two early hotspots for the pandemic. Fire District 3 personnel provide both BLS and ALS first response to an area with approximately 54,000 residents and work closely with the other fire departments and EMS services in the county.

Chief Robert Horton arrived in southern Oregon in 2017 after spending his entire career with the Las Vegas Fire Department, most recently as assistant chief for EMS. Now he was facing potentially his biggest challenge of his two decades in the fire service. Chief Horton knew that tackling the COVID-19 outbreak would require a methodical, data-driven approach.

“ With a data-driven mindset, we knew that it had to be deliberate, and they had to be informed decisions. ”

Chief Robert Horton



The Need

Even before the term COVID-19 had been coined, Chief Horton had discussed the need for better surveillance of the 911 and EMS systems in Jackson County. Early on in his tenure, in a conversation with a member of the county health department, he discovered that while the county conducted surveillance of emergency departments, it did not regularly monitor data from the county's consolidated 911 center or fire and EMS response agencies.

Once COVID-19 struck, public health and public safety officials quickly recognized the need to ramp up their information gathering and analysis. They knew they faced multiple potential threats: rising call volumes, outbreaks at high-risk facilities, and the need to isolate or quarantine personnel, just to name a few. They quickly began considering new policies and protocols—including adding medical personnel to help triage calls in the 911 center, routing callers directly into telehealth if appropriate, reducing the number of vehicles and staff responding to medical calls when appropriate, and more. But Chief Horton wanted to implement policies based on evidence, not assumption, whenever possible.

“With a data-driven mindset, we knew that it had to be deliberate, and they had to be informed decisions,” he explains.

Solution

Even before the pandemic, Horton had talked to FirstWatch's Terry Fitch about what it would look like to implement the system in Jackson County. But once conversations began in earnest about conducting surveillance of the EMS and 911 system during COVID-19, Horton and his Jackson County colleagues knew they had to move quickly.

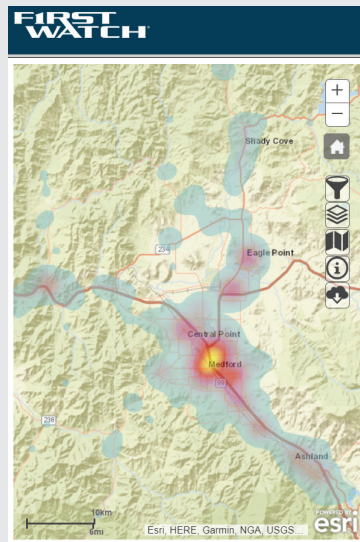
“I didn't feel like we had weeks to get it implemented, because our community and our responders were at risk and we needed to be able to make informed decisions,” the chief says.

Although his department, Jackson County Fire District 3, was only responsible for a portion of the county, the team there recognized that a countywide solution made more sense. Instead of waiting for the multiple agencies to figure out a way to each contribute to FirstWatch installation and implementation, Horton asked his board to approve paying for the system for the entire county. He has faith that once the dust settles, Fire District 3's partners will contribute.

“Our power is in our unity, in our collaboration,” Horton says. “Many of our agencies don't have the budgets to support them all on our own,

notwithstanding that sometimes it doesn't make sense if just this area of the region does it, when we know there could be a benefit for the larger one.”

Two days after signing the contract with FirstWatch, data started flowing, and Jackson County's emergency services organizations started using the system to monitor its performance, establish triggers to alert responders when a call required upgraded precautions, notify public health officials of potential COVID-19 calls at high-risk locations, and more.



Conclusion

Horton credits the quick installation of FirstWatch with giving the public safety officials, medical directors and responders the information and data they needed to make the right decisions during the initial response to the coronavirus pandemic.

“We couldn't have implemented these programs and these operational directives without having a quality assurance tool for us to know that we were doing it responsibly and that it was informed,” he explains. “That's what FirstWatch did for us.”

To watch the videos related to this interview, visit: firstwatch.net/story20200506

FirstWatch is proud to partner with innovative thinkers like Chief Robert Horton and his team in Jackson County, Oregon, to help their communities fight COVID-19.

For more information, visit firstwatch.net



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