

ASAP to PSAP Shines Through the Storm

AUTOMATED SECURE ALARM PROTOCOL SURVIVES RECENT NATURAL DISASTERS & PERFORMS FLAWLESSLY BY BILL HOBGOOD

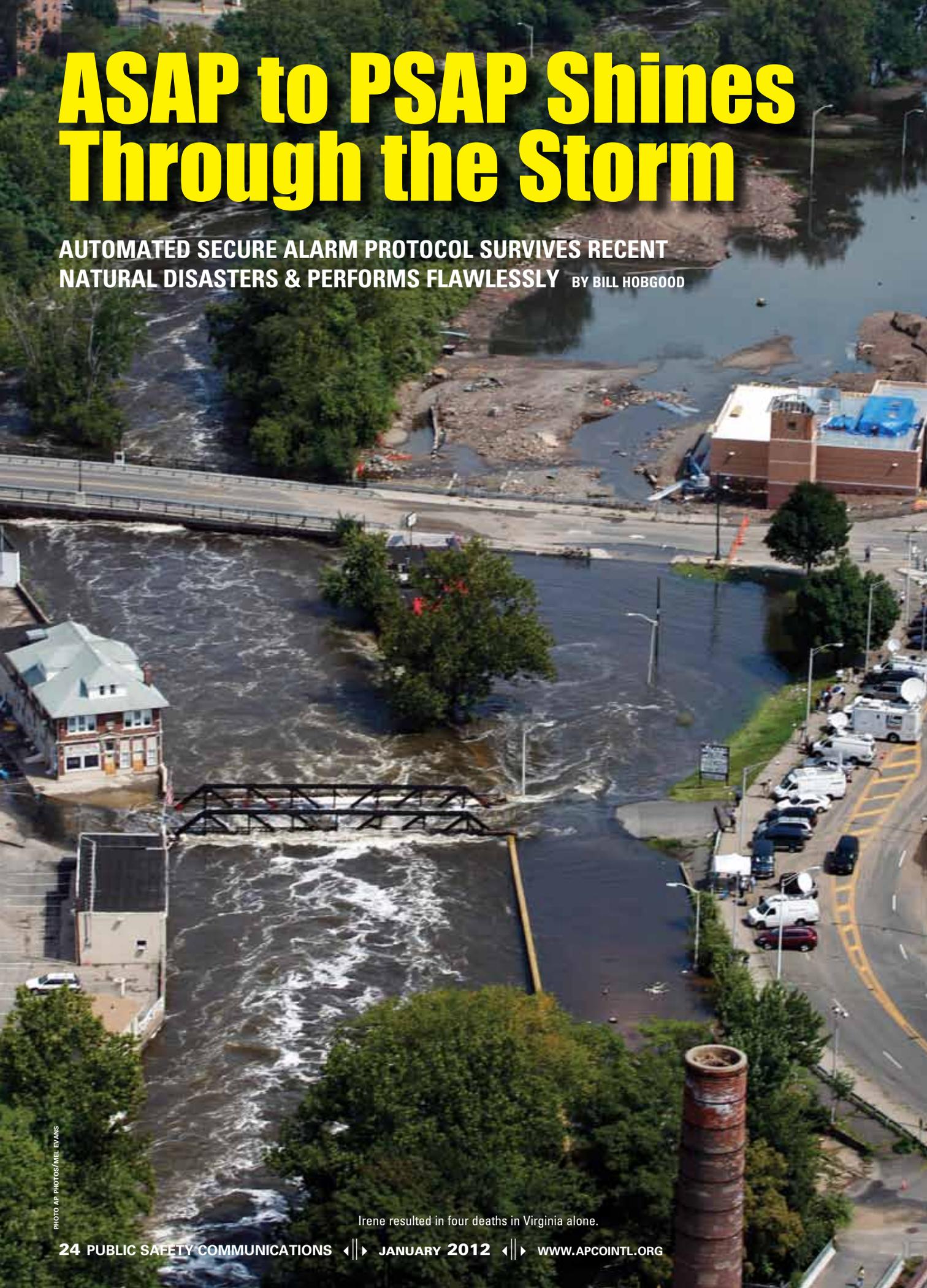


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Irene resulted in four deaths in Virginia alone.



Momentum continues to build following the announcement that Houston has launched the ANSI-approved Automated Secure Alarm Protocol (ASAP), formerly known as the External Alarm Interface Exchange. ASAP was successfully piloted by the city of Richmond, Va., and York County, Va.

The April 2011 Houston implementation was announced during a July 2011 press conference followed by the article “ASAP to PSAP” (August 2011 *PSC*) in concert with the 2011 APCO International Conference & Expo. At least a half-dozen CAD providers are now developing an interface product to use the ASAP, and several others have received information about it. Nearly 100 PSAPs have expressed an interest in learning more about the ASAP program. Some of the largest alarm companies that PSAP managers ask about when the ASAP program is discussed have committed to participate soon. Aside from the goals and benefits already published, the ASAP proved its worth again during recent natural disasters that affected central Virginia.

EARTHQUAKE HITS CENTRAL VIRGINIA

On Aug. 23, 2011, at 1:51 p.m. Eastern, a magnitude 5.8 earthquake struck. According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the epicenter, nearly four miles underground, was near Cuckoo in Louisa County, Va., about 41 miles from downtown Richmond. Light to moderate damage was reported in Central Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. The earthquake was felt as far south as Georgia and north to Maine, parts of Canada and west to Illinois. The USGS reported that this was the largest Virginia earthquake recorded by seismometers.

In the eastern U.S., earthquakes can be felt over an area 10 times larger than a quake of the same magnitude in the western U.S. Historically, strong earthquakes along the Eastern Seaboard are very rare.

Immediately after the earthquake, people inside buildings in Richmond evacuated. The Richmond 9-1-1 PSAP was quickly inundated by citizens calling to report the earthquake or in a panic to obtain information about it. Ten 9-1-1 calltakers handled over 600 telephone calls over a two-hour period. (*Note:* Richmond is currently expanding to 24 positions.)

HURRICANE IRENE STRIKES

Central Virginia was especially hard hit when Hurricane Irene inflicted her wrath on Aug. 27–28. Unlike the unexpected earthquake, Irene was an expected but unwelcome guest. The 9-1-1 PSAP filled every calltaker position. Once again, the 9-1-1 PSAP was inundated, handling nearly 3,500 telephone calls during the 24 hours considered to be the worse of the storm.

Irene caused power outages throughout the majority of the Richmond metropolitan area. Some outages were not resolved for two weeks. Statewide, 2.5 million Virginians were without power at one point.

Hundreds of trees were blown over, and many of them fell into structures or blocked roads. At least four deaths in Virginia were attributed to Irene.

ASAP PROVES ITS WORTH

Most PSAPs require calltakers to answer 9-1-1 calls first, taking priority over any other telephone line ringing. Alarm monitoring companies generally cannot dial 9-1-1 to deliver an alarm notification to a PSAP. Instead, they must call the PSAP on a seven- or 10-digit telephone number. When all the calltakers are busy handling 9-1-1 calls, these telephone lines will continue to ring until a calltaker is no longer busy dealing with 9-1-1 calls. During both natural disasters, the Richmond PSAP was overwhelmed to the point that many of the centrex lines rang for 20–30 minutes before finally being answered. The alarm companies who do not participate in ASAP had to endure this lengthy wait while trying to reach the Richmond PSAP during both events when trying to deliver an alarm notification to Richmond. Many alarm companies likely gave up trying to reach the PSAP.

For two alarm monitoring companies, Vector Security and Monitronics, it was business as usual in making contact with the Richmond PSAP to deliver alarm notifications. Both alarm companies use ASAP to forward alarm notifications to the city of Richmond. Richmond’s CAD system returns responses to these alarm companies using ASAP. There were no telephone calls between these alarm companies and Richmond’s PSAP. Alarm notifications to Richmond were delivered in five seconds directly to Richmond’s CAD system using Nlets and the Virginia state control point. A third alarm company, United Central Control, also uses ASAP but currently has no alarm subscribers in Richmond. UCC has a large concentration in Houston.

THE BOTTOM LINE

ASAP performed flawlessly and effectively as it does daily. ASAP has no need to compete with an inundated telephone system. Whereas the city of Richmond never stopped responding to alarm events, one of ASAP’s published best practices allows PSAPs to require CAD providers who provide an ASAP solution to include a feature that can be triggered by the PSAP manager to automatically reject any incoming alarm events and send a reject notification to the alarm company.

Both Houston and Richmond receive 10–13% of all alarm notifications from alarm companies using ASAP. This percentage will soon swell as many other alarm companies soon start using ASAP. **||PSC||**

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