

9-1-1 HAS AN EMERGENCY: WHERE ARE WE GOING TO GO?

When a tornado struck, emergency communications center personnel discovered their evacuation plan was inadequate.

By Angelia Koski

Every public safety telecommunicator has that call or shift that sticks out and will forever be imbedded in their mind. Mine was the morning of January 22, 1999. Yes, it has been 21 years, but I still remember it like it was yesterday. It was the morning an F3 tornado struck downtown Clarksville, Tennessee, and the building that housed our communications center took a direct hit.

As we arrived to work the midnight shift that January evening, it was unseasonably warm with severe storms approaching. The news was predicting tornadic activity. We knew this was not going to be a normal Thursday night/Friday morning shift. At that time our communications center was on the top floor of the six-story Criminal Justice Complex. We called it the penthouse, and the front wall of windows overlooked the city. Our shift consisted of five telecommunicators – a newly appointed supervisor, one telecommunicator fresh out of training and three others with several years under their belts. We had never had an occasion to evacuate our center, and our agency did not have a backup



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