

# Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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## “New Cruiser Laptops”



It's a police station on wheels. The City of Norfolk Police Department has recently installed Mobile Data Computers in their police cruisers.

Police Sergeant Don Miller was instrumental in getting the laptop computers into the hands of the police officers on patrol in Norfolk.

“We started looking at the idea of having MDCs about five years ago and researched what grants might be available. This summer we were able to

purchase seven laptops,” Miller said. The cost for each specially designed Dell laptop is about \$4500. Each is built according to combat specifications with solid state hard drives and nearly indestructible cases.

Miller said that laptops are essential for public and officer safety.

“A police officer needs to get information quickly. With an MDC an officer can quickly find out whether a person he or she has pulled over is wanted for a felony charge or is driving a stolen vehicle. The more information we have about the people we're dealing with, the better decisions we can make. If a person has a history of assaulting officers, we may want to call for backup. We're always cautious,” Miller said.

The officer can call the dispatcher for information or obtain it by entering drivers' license data and vehicle plate numbers into the laptops. The laptops have built in cellular cards so are connected to the police department's database and intranet as well as the Internet anywhere there is cell phone reception.

“This substantially reduces our reliance on dispatchers who are also busy with their own array of responsibilities. As things get busy, the dispatchers' responsibilities expand as they also dispatch for other law enforcement and fire/rescue agencies as well as weather services,” Miller said.

The City's database contains the history of any citation or warning that has been given in the city as well as most citizen contacts. The police department also has a subscription to the Nebraska Criminal Justice Information

System (NCJIS) so that officers can find a person's criminal history recorded in Nebraska. There may be a warrant out for a person's arrest or their license may have been suspended or revoked.

A search in the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicle database (using NCJIS) may turn up a stolen vehicle which may be why the person in the vehicle was speeding. The driver may not have their driver's license with them or may be trying to use someone else's name. NCJIS allows the officers to verify a person's identity and driver's license photo should this occur.

If a person has law enforcement related issues such as a suspended license or a warrant for their arrest their name will be flagged in the database to make officers aware of potential danger. Miller said that even addresses in the police division's database may be flagged for having vicious dogs or residents with a history of violence.

The officers can also use aerial photography that is flown and purchased by the engineering division on their laptops. They may need to find a way into a home where someone has barricaded themselves. The aerial photography will show fences, bushes and parking spaces in the area to help the officers find alternate routes into the home.

Officers also can enter information for police reports in the mobile laptops. "For every hour of a call they respond to, there can be another two or three hours of reports to be filed. It helps if they can do some of that on site or later when pulled over into a parking lot," Miller said.

To access or enter data, officers use both a keyboard and a touch screen and log into several layers of security. External USB keyboards can also be used for ease of typing.

The department is testing dictation software so that in the near future the officers will be able to dictate their reports right into a Microsoft Word document rather than type them. At some point, Miller said they would also like to issue e-citations from the cruisers. A person's drivers' license would be swiped through a scanner. The officer would then print off a citation through a portable printer.

"In the near future, we may begin to complete and submit State of Nebraska accident reports from the car. We can already do the accident diagrams from the car and send them to the police department," Miller said.

The officers have been using the laptops since the end of September and are finding them to be indispensable tools. "During emergencies, the radio traffic is very busy making it difficult at best to get the answers we need quickly. By being able to access the information on our own we are much more accurate, efficient and effective," Miller said.