

DISPATCH Magazine

On-Line

Stories from the on-line edition at www.911Dispatch.com

Florida Legislators Pursue Mandatory Training

The long legislative task of improved training for Florida's public safety dispatchers may be closer at hand, after two legislators have introduced bills to make certification mandatory, and to provide funding for the required fees. State Rep. Ken Roberson (R) and Sen. Nancy Detert (R) have introduced companion bills that would establish a minimum of 232 hours of training for certification, would make that certification mandatory, and allow agencies to use state funds to pay the certification fees that the legislation sets up. The issue of dispatcher training in the state came up several years ago, but the legislature has been reluctant to set up and fund a mandatory training program. Legislators approved an optional, unfunded certification program after the high-profile kidnap-murder of Denise Lee in Jan. 2008. Ever since, Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) and Lee's family have been working to extend the current program. The current proposed bills also expands the definition of dispatcher to include radio dispatching duties, sets up grandfathering criteria for current dispatchers, and establishes 20 hours of update training every two years to maintain certification. ☞

Largest Discipline Case In History: 175 Cited

The country's largest city has disciplined the largest number of public safety dispatchers in history. The New York City Police Department has cited 175 9-1-1 calltakers for mishandling fire incidents, the result of over 2,000 complaints by the firefighters' union. According to city officials, over the past month 135 calltakers have had their vacation or sick leave docked, and another 40 calltakers received a warning letter for their mistakes. City officials say the errors involved obtaining or passing along incorrect locations for fire incidents. Earlier this year, the city changed how fire incidents are handled, by having 911 calltakers directly handle fire incidents and enter the information into CAD. Previously, the 911 call takers evaluated the incident, and transferred fire incidents to one of the borough-based comm centers. The dispatchers' union says the mistakes are the result of merging the fire department's STARFIRE CAD system with the 911 CAD system—not all street locations matched up, the union says. The firefighters' union also says dispatchers received only 2-1/2 hours of training on the new procedures, instead of the city-promised eight hours. ☞

Police Say Dispatcher Tipped Drug Suspects

A former Coles County (Ill.) dispatcher has been cited for official misconduct, after Mattoon police say they learned that last April she telephoned a drug suspect and warned him police were enroute to his location. Ashley Sears, 25, was also charged with divulging confidential information to an unauthorized person, and of removing documents from the comm center related to the incident. She faces a maximum of five years in prison if convicted on both charges. According to police, Sears was working in the comm center when a co-worker fielded a telephone call from a citizen reporting a person dealing drugs. Sears heard the information, and then used a cellular phone to call a man, who police

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Check the Icons!

Check any icons at the end of each story to see if there is on-line material to enhance the story:

 — there's a logging tape posted

 — there's a link or Acrobat (pdf) file posted



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What's Up?

Florida legislators continue to work towards the goal set by the family of kidnap-murder victim Denise Lee—mandatory, funded, standardized training for every public safety dispatcher in the state. So far, the state has established only an optional, unfunded certification program that sets a minimum number of training hours for dispatchers. The efforts fall in the same month that the state of Maine began a program of mandatory training for its centralized 911 operation.

Sadly, tragedy struck more than once during the month, as dispatchers died from an accident and suicide. Another dispatcher was the victim of an arson attack on his home. These incidents demonstrate that dispatchers are still “ordinary” people in life, and subject to the same tragedies that befall everyone else. Thankfully, comm centers are also tremendously supportive workplaces.

Over a year after the incident, an investigation concluded that an Ohio dispatcher was most likely not asleep just before he answered a 911 call that later turned into a murder case. There are still questions why the accusation was kept secret for a year, and why an investigation wasn't performed immediately.

And are you prepared for the unexpected 911 call? You may recall the young woman whose car was struck and carried along the tracks for several miles as she dialed 911 for help. Now a Canadian man jumped a train as a shortcut home, and dialed 911 when the train sped up and he couldn't jump off. He nearly froze in -14°F temperatures before a dispatcher could determine his local and direct emergency units to his location.

Gary Allen - Editor

DISPATCH Monthly Magazine was founded in 1988 by Alan Burton (1934-2007) with the goals:

- Improved training
- Improved working conditions
- Improved self-esteem
- Individual and collective recognition
- Enhanced professionalism

have identified as the person that the citizen was reporting. Police found no drugs or other crime when they arrived at the location. The incident is one of several this year involving dispatchers who have been arrested for drug crimes or assisting drug suspects. Read more about the arrest here. Follow-up: Sears was formally bound over for trial by a judge, and shortly after she pleaded guilty. ☞

Did Text Message 'Save' Robbery Victim? No.


A suburban Houston man who was forced into the trunk of his car at gunpoint by two robbers used his cellular telephone to send a text message for help. But the text message wasn't the reason he was located and rescued by Fort Bend County sheriff's deputies. Instead, it was a voice telephone call from a dispatcher that saved the day. The incident emphasizes the limitations of wireless text messaging, and that a simple voice conversation with a crime victim can be the most helpful form of communications. Once in the trunk, the man text'ed a friend, who dialed 911. A sheriff's dispatcher called the victim's cellular phone, but could barely make out what the man was saying. Listening to both the victim and two suspects, the dispatcher figured out the car was enroute to a local bank. The dispatcher directed deputies to the nearest ATM, and they arrived just as the two suspects were forcing the man to withdraw money. ☞

Policy Doesn't Prohibit Comm Center Movies

The policy and procedure manual for the Colorado State Patrol comm center doesn't prohibit dispatchers from bringing their personal laptops to work, nor does it forbid watching movies or playing games on the laptops. The issue of dispatcher distractions was raised earlier this month when a 911 caller reported a deer vs. car accident. A trooper wasn't dispatched for nine minutes, and before the trooper arrived a second vehicle swerved to avoid the disabled vehicle, crashed and killed two persons. The State Patrol policy does prohibit “the use of the Internet except for business related inquiries.” However, other uses of personal laptops is permitted. The three State Patrol dispatchers who handled the incident are on paid leave during an investigation. ☞

Update: Dispatcher Fired for Neglect of Duty


The chief of the North Port (Fla.) police department has announced that dispatcher Nadia Kashitskaya has been fired for violating procedures and neglect of duty, in connection with her handling of a 911 call on Dec. 11th reporting a vehicle accident. During an interview, chief Terry Lewis held back tears while telling reporters that

Kashitskaya is, “a fine and decent person. She cares about her community and made a mistake.” But Lewis said he also recognized that the incident, “has significantly damaged citizen confidence in our system, in our call handling and in our police department.” Lewis has asked two other agencies to review the comm center’s training methods and review dispatcher skills. Kashitskaya fielded a 911 call from a caller reporting a man on the ground along a rural road. When the caller couldn’t provide a specific address and suggested sending a police unit out to the area, Kashitskaya replied, “Unfortunately our system doesn’t work like that. I have to have something.” No police responded, and the same person called back the next day with a better address. Arriving police found Brian Wood, 55, dead on the pavement. Read more about the firing here. 


Tragedy Strikes Family, Comm Center

The 911CARES organization is notifying public safety comm centers of a tragedy that occurred on Christmas Eve in Audrain County (Mo.). A 23 year-old man who worked as a dispatcher for the E-911 Joint Communications Center committed suicide, leaving behind a 1 year-old son. His family, friends and co-workers are mourning his loss, especially those who handled the 911 call reporting the incident and the first-responders who arrived on-scene. 911CARES says the center’s 18 dispatchers, “could use any form of prayers, cards of support or anything you might appreciate under like circumstances.” Check the 911CARES Web site for any updates, and send any condolences to the comm center at: Audrain County E-911, 1854 E. Liberty St., Mexico MO 65265.


911 Call Documents Robbery, Shootings

Police in Elyria (Ohio) say a 911 call from an apartment house documented an invasion robbery by two men that ended with one suspect and one resident dead from gunfire, and one resident seriously injured. Three suspects forced their way into the apartment, and one resident immediately dialed 911, but apparently put the phone down to confront the robbers. Gunfire is heard on the logging tape, and shortly after the call ends. The police dispatcher called the phone back, and the wounded resident told her, “We got a home invasion. Somebody just came in here.” The caller also said two other men had been hit by gunfire. Police later arrested a third suspect who fled before police arrived. 

Consultant: No Evidence of Dispatcher Sleeping

A consultant hired by Warren County (Ohio) has concluded that there is insufficient evidence to support an allegation that public safety dispatcher Ron Kronenberger was asleep before he handled a 911 call in Aug. 2008, which later led to a murder investigation. A report filed by Mark Lucas of the firm Clemans, Nelson & Associates said a fellow dispatcher wasn’t 100 percent sure he saw Kronenberger sleeping, and that Kronenberger had answered several other telephone calls just prior to the 911 call. During the murder investigation, officials noted that Kronenberger sounded dazed, confused and slow to react while handling the 911 call. Officials now say Kronenberger will not be disciplined. The 911 call was from a man who claimed his wife drowned in a bathtub, but officials later alleged he murdered his wife and covered it up. 

911 System Couldn’t Pinpoint Fire Victim’s Call

The three victims of a fatal fire in Cheektowaga (NY) dialed 911 for help, but the Phase I-only system could not pinpoint their location, leading to a 28-minute response delay. A man and his two college-age daughters died when their small house caught fire in the middle of the night. Erie County 911 officials say a dispatcher there received a 911 call at 2:56 a.m., and heard a woman screaming. The dispatcher was only able to make out that the incident was on Hyland Ave., but the street runs two towns—Cheektowaga and Depew. The 911 system only displayed the location of the receiving cell phone tower in Depew. The Buffalo dispatcher relayed the information to Depew police at 3:02 a.m., who couldn’t locate the incident, and who then relayed the information to Cheektowaga police at 3:04 a.m. Officers arrived near the scene at 3:13 a.m., still not knowing the nature of the incident. The officers smelled smoke and began a search of the neighborhood. After discovering the house set back on a lot, they requested the fire department at 3:20 a.m., and crews arrived at 3:24 a.m. Officers had pulled the man’s body from the fire but could not revive him. Firefighters later found the bodies of the two women. Officials blamed Erie County’s 911 system, which does not have Phase II location features. 

Did Movie Watching Delay Response to Fatal Accident?

Three Colorado State Patrol dispatchers have been put on paid leave during an investigation into the handling of a 911 call reporting a dead deer in the traffic lanes of Interstate 25 south of Colorado Springs last week. A trooper wasn’t dispatched for 10 minutes, and then four

minutes later a motorist swerved to avoid the deer, the vehicle overturned and the driver was killed and a passenger seriously injured. According to State Patrol officials, one of the dispatchers was watching “a Christmas movie” during the incident, which may have contributed to the 10-minute dispatch delay. As it turned out, two KRDO-TV employees struck the deer on the highway, and they dialed 911 to report the dead deer was still in the roadway. A dispatcher told the TV employees to dial *CSP directly, and they did. The information was entered into CAD, but apparently was not immediately radioed to a trooper. It’s not clear if a trooper would have arrived in time to prevent the accident, even if the incident had been promptly dispatched, officials noted. State Patrol officials said the delay was noted by another dispatcher and brought to a supervisor’s attention. A spokesperson said the Patrol has taken measures, “to ensure that issue of distraction is being identified and eliminated from any workplace.”

Dispatcher/EMTs Suspended After Pregnant Woman’s Death

Two New York City EMS dispatchers have been suspended without pay after witnesses say they refused to use their EMT skills to help a pregnant woman who collapsed while working in a café where the two dispatchers were buying bagels. Dispatchers Jason Green and Melissa Jackson—both in uniform—took no action on Dec. 9th, workers at the restaurant said, but instead told them to call 911. The dispatchers left before an ambulance arrived 15 minutes later to take Eutisha Rennix to a hospital, where she and her unborn child died. According to news accounts, both Green and Jackson are trained EMTs, but don’t normally have in-person patient contacts. Green is a 6-year veteran and Jackson has four years of service. Fire department officials say all their employees are required to take appropriate actions, but an attorney for the two dispatchers said they acted, “appropriately to the best of their abilities.” NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg called the incident an “outrage,” saying the dispatchers were still human beings—“Drop your coffee and go help someboy if they’re dying,” he said angrily at a press conference. The fire department and state health department have launched investigations into the incident.

Long Response Times During Seattle Storm

A newspaper investigation has found that Seattle fire and EMS units failed to arrive promptly at medical emergencies during a paralyzing 2008 winter storm, and that city officials covered up the delays and didn’t include the problem in an after-action report. Accord-

ing to the Seattle Times, fire units and AMR ambulances were delayed by streets blocked by snow and covered with ice, leading to arrival times that were well beyond the 4-minute/90 percent standard used by the city for “Code Red” medical incidents, which are the most serious. Incidents peaked at 200 for four consecutive days, putting a strain on the EMS system. Fire units that did arrive on-scene frequently had to wait many minutes until AMR arrived, further depleting available fire department resources. The newspaper said neither the fire department or AMR was asked to contribute to a major after-action report, nor asked how the agencies could better respond during snow storms. In fact, the report claimed police, fire and EMS responses were not affected, and responses were only delayed by one additional minute.

Remote Location Slowed Accident Response

The remote location of a single-vehicle, fatal accident near the New Mexico—Colorado state line contributed to a 41-minute response time, officials say. For some reason, the vehicle of Colorado resident Patricia Jacquez crashed into a ditch about in that state, two miles north of the state boundary. Another motorist came across the crash scene and tried dialing 911, but there was no coverage there. The motorist dialed a friend in the town of Redmesa, who then dialed 911 to reach the public safety comm center in La Plata County (Colo.). A dispatcher there put the caller on hold three times to answer other 911 calls, and eventually gave a location that was in New Mexico.

Dispatcher Pleads Guilty for Drug Tip-Off

Former Coles County (Ill.) dispatcher Ashley Sears, 25, has pleaded guilty of official misconduct after a judge found there was sufficient evidence to send the case to trial. According to police, while on-duty a co-worker fielded a citizen’s telephone call reporting a person dealing drugs. Sears heard the information, and then used a cellular phone to call and warn the person the citizen had reported.

Man Hops Trains, Nearly Freezes 40 Miles Later

An Alberta (Canada) man who decided to hop a freight train for a five-block ride home from a party nearly died when the train sped up and headed south out of town, with the man clinging to the rungs of a boxcar ladder. Jonathan Hambler, 29, survived after he dialed 911 in the -14°F temperature. But he had to hang on to the rungs with no gloves for over an hour after dispatchers learned there were two trains headed south at nearly the

same time. Canadian Pacific Railway dispatchers had the engineers blow their whistles so Hambler could tell which train he was on. Finally, the train slowed down and police located Hambler 43 miles south of Wetaskiwin, nearly unconscious. He received a \$268 tickets. 📧

Police Dispatcher Killed in Vehicle Crash

A veteran Girard (Ohio) police dispatcher was killed early Wednesday morning when his car crashed into a truck on Interstate 80. Thomas Zuppo, 47, was an 11-year veteran of the agency, where his father also served 35 years as a police officer. State Patrol officers say Zuppo's vehicle was traveling at "a high rate of speed" when it struck a slower-moving, Department of Transportation truck that was distributing salt on the roadway. Zuppo's car caught fire, and Zuppo died immediately, officers said. The truck driver received slight injuries. Girard police chief Jeff Palmer said the department was shocked at the death. "Obviously, he was well-liked by everyone here," he said. Zuppo had worked an afternoon shift on Tuesday and Wednesday was his day off, Palmer said. Zuppo is survived by his wife, stepchildren and grandchildren. 📧

Confusion Over Location Leads to Delay

The victim of a single-vehicle auto accident in North Port (Fla.) lay undiscovered outside his truck for almost 24 hours, after a dispatcher was apparently confused by the street names given by a 911 caller who drove by the accident scene. Police chief Terry Lewis said dispatcher Nadia Kashitskaya had been put on paid leave while the incident is investigated. He said a motorist dialed 911 at 11:38 p.m. on Friday night after seeing the accident on a mostly rural roadway. The caller described the cross street correctly, but had trouble describing the second street. The caller believed it was "Lovebird" or "Lovesong," when in fact it was "Lovering." For some reason, the dispatcher did not create an incident and have officers investigate that night. The same caller called 911 again at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday to again report the accident, and this time officers responded to find the victim dead. 📧

Woman Calls For Help, Gunfire Heard

The Washington County (Minn.) Sheriff's Office has released a transcript of a 911 call, during which a woman is fatally shot by her husband. As recorded on the logging tape, Off. Brad Allen arrived, confronted the husband, and then fatally shot him when the man pointed a gun at him. Trudy Propps dialed 911 to help get her reluctant husband to the local Veterans Administration hospital. During the call with an unnamed sheriff's

dispatcher, she also talked to Gerald Propps. About two minutes into the call Gerald apparently became angry, produced a handgun and shot his wife. Trudy managed to stumble into the hallway of the apartment building, where her daughter pulled her down the hallway and picked up the 911 call. After Off. Allen arrives, he yells for Gerald to put down the gun, and then a second round of gunfire is heard on the tape. 📧

State Mandatory Training Begins

After three years of legislative efforts, curriculum selection and instructor training, the state of Maine has begun a program of mandatory training for all local dispatchers. The 40-hour program focuses on basic call handling, recordkeeping and radio operations, leaving specific policy and procedure matters to local agencies. The state is one of a few in the U.S. that first answers all 911 calls at a central comm center, and then transfers calls to the appropriate local agency. Stephan Bunker, trainer for Maine 9-1-1, told a newspaper, "We don't want Maine to fall prey because we didn't care enough about this profession to at least provide them with a basic minimum-training program." He added that it will supplement and standardize the local training that agencies now perform. The courses are financed by the state's regular 911 surcharge. Bunker was honored last August as the Trainer of the Year by the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO). 📧

County Ponders Radio System Future

The original contract that DuPage County (Ill.) officials signed was for \$7.1 million, agreeing to pay Motorola for a county-wide public safety radio system. Now those same officials say the final price could be \$48 million, and that several local agencies are considering a pull-out because the cost is too high. There are also challenges to link to a M/A-COMM (Harris Corp.) system being built separately by Naperville and Aurora. As an alternative, the county is considering a less expensive plan to join the state-wide radio system, also built by Motorola. 📧

Woman Shoots Intruder, Dispatcher On the Line

Lincoln County (Okla.) sheriff's dispatcher Brenda Hart handled the 911 call of a lifetime when she picked up the phone, ringing in from a woman several miles outside the town of Cushing, and reporting that someone was trying to smash her back patio glass door with a chair. Resident Donna Jackson armed herself with a shotgun, and over the next 10 minutes described the man in the darkness, yelling, screaming and trying to break

through the door. Jackson was ready to shoot the man if he entered and, in fact, Hart told her she would be justified if the man came inside. When the glass did break, and the man came inside, Jackson fired her 16-gauge shotgun, fatally wounding the man. And then, for nearly another 15 minutes, Hart kept Jackson on the line until sheriff's deputies arrived. At the end of the long call, Jackson's son, a tribal police chief, is conferenced into the call for an emotional moment with his mother, and to reassure her that she did the right thing. The county district attorney has ruled Jackson acted legally in shooting the man, and no charges will be filed. Listen to the call here, and read more here. [Editor - The call is over 32 minutes long, but I recommend that you listen straight through to share Hart's experience in handling the tense, dramatic and emotional call. The incident and the call is an excellent example of how 911 is the only lifeline for millions of people, and that the role of a dispatcher extends way beyond just gathering information and talking—it's about connecting and helping.] 📞 📄

Burned Man Dials 911 For Help

When a New Albany (Ind.) man was badly burned from a furnace explosion, he jumped into his car for the 4-mile drive to the hospital. But he barely made it. During the painful drive Eric Rayl dialed 911 and reached New Albany dispatcher Frieda Mascio, who told Rayl to keep driving. Fire Department battalion chief Chris Rainbolt called Mascio a "hero" for handling the call, and Rayl also praised her assistance. 📞 📄

Follow-Up: Dispatcher Disciplined for Response Delay

After an investigation into a response delay, a Rome-Floyd County (Geo.) 911 dispatcher has been suspended for two weeks without pay and demoted from supervisor to dispatcher. Renee Baldwin fielded telephone calls from a family who had received threatening phone calls from Robert Spriggs Jr., but she failed to dispatch officers to their location. Instead, she sent officers to the house from which she believed Spriggs was calling. But Spriggs had already left that location, where he shot and killed a man, and was enroute to the caller's home, where he shot and wounded a second man. The decision not to send officers to the family created a nearly 30-minute delay, allowing Spriggs to arrive at the house well before police. Spriggs later surrendered to police and has been charged with murder and assault. Read more about the discipline here. 📞 📄

Police Dispatcher's Home Targeted by Arsonist

Police in Quincy (Mass.) believe that a second fire at the home of one of their dispatchers was set by an arsonist, and say they have at least one suspect. Dispatcher Michael Bowes lives at the house with his parents, who were home when the fire was set on the front porch at about 1:36 a.m. Saturday. Bowes was on-duty at the time, and dispatched officers to the scene. Bowes' parents were safely rescued from the house and were not injured. A fire in September damaged a destroyed a garage fed by propane tanks. 📞 📄

County's Freq Request Becomes Reg Issue

A New Jersey county's proposal to build a new public safety radio system using television spectrum is being used by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to settle questions about narrow-banding and the digital TV transition. Monmouth County asked the FCC for a waiver in Jan. 2009, saying they wanted to build a county-wide system for its law enforcement, fire and EMS agencies, but that an APCO search found no frequencies in the assigned public safety bands were available. They asked for a waiver to use frequencies in the TV band, saying nearby stations in New York and Philadelphia wouldn't receive interference from their proposed system. Now, in a request for comments on the petition, the FCC has added two additional, "hot topic" questions it will consider before granting the waiver: if the FCC's plans for a nation-wide public safety wireless network would provide an alternative solution, and if the upcoming 2013 narrow-banding deadline might create additional channels for Monmouth County. Previous waiver requests considered only if there were truly no available frequencies, and if the action would be in the public interest. 📞 📄

City Responds to Family's Lawsuit Over 911

The city of Murphy (Tex.) has released the logging tape of a 911 call involving the 2007 death of a toddler who was strangled when he got caught in a backyard soccer net. The family of Matthew Cantrell has sued the city, saying that a Murphy dispatcher failed to give any medical instructions, and that when Murphy police arrived on-scene, they prevented EMS personnel from treating their 21 month-old son. The city has said dispatcher Stephen Williamson and on-scene personnel did everything possible to save the child. Those actions included conferencing in the East Texas Medical Center to the 911 call so that agency could provide pre-arrival medical instructions to the caller. During the 5-minute logging tape just released, Ave Cantrell is hysterical nearly the

entire time Williamson sends police and EMS units to the house, and then talks with the EMS dispatcher. The city also released testimony from those who responded to the scene, allegedly showing that they properly examined the child, but that he was beyond any treatment. 📞

Delayed Response to Murder, Shooting

An investigation by Rome (Geo.) and Floyd County police departments has concluded that a county dispatcher failed to follow procedures when dispatching units to a double shooting that occurred at two locations separated by 17 miles. The mistake created a nearly 30-minute delay in responding to a home where Robert Spriggs Jr. was threatening a family, and later shot and wounded a resident. Spriggs fled, but was eventually talked into surrendering and was charged with murder and assault. A police report on the incident concluded that the dispatcher should have immediately dispatched units to the home in Rome where Spriggs might be heading, at the same time that officers were sent to a location in the county from which Spriggs was apparently calling on a cellular phone. 📞

After Murder, Dispatcher Saves Suspect From Suicide

The logging tape of a 911 call from a Albuquerque (NM) man who shot and killed his infant daughter tells the story—the unnamed police dispatcher saved his life. Christopher Rains, 22, had a dispute with the baby's mother and, fearing she would leave and take the child, used a .45-cal. pistol to kill the 9 month-old baby. Suicidal and believing he would go to prison "for the rest of my life," Rains alternately cried and gave information to the police dispatcher, who kept him on the line while officers responded to the scene. During the 7-minute call, the dispatcher convinced Rains to stay on the phone, not use the gun on himself, and then surrender to police. 📞