


DISPATCH Magazine

On-Line

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

Dispatcher, Officers Investigated Over E-mail

An unnamed Grand Prairie (Tex.) dispatcher and four officers have been put on paid administrative leave during an investigation into e-mail they circulated among themselves that allegedly made racist references to President Obama. According to GPPD spokesperson Det. John Brimmer, one of the four received e-mail from outside the department containing the references, and then forwarded the e-mail to others using the city's e-mail system. The incident is all the more disturbing, since two years ago the police department was required to undergo diversity training after an allegation of racist behavior. A police source told the newspaper that allegedly the e-mail contains references to the tail number of Air Force One. An internal investigation is complete, and the chief is considering what discipline to apply to the five employees. 

Dispatcher ID'd In Fatal Vehicle Accident

Police in South Charleston (W. Virg.) have identified the victim of an accident at 7:30 a.m. today as Shawn Aldridge, 42, a dispatcher at the South Charleston detachment of the West Virginia State Police. Police say Aldridge was traveling north on Jefferson Road when his Jeep convertible ran off the road into a ditch, and overturned several times. Aldridge was not wearing a seat belt, police say, and was thrown from the vehicle. He was declared dead at the scene. A State Police spokesperson did not say if Aldridge had either just left work or was arriving for a shift at the comm center. The Troop 4 headquarters is less than a mile north of the accident location, the direction Aldridge was headed when the accident occurred.

Many Questions Raised in Officer Shooting

There are many questions to be asked during the investigation into an officer-involved shooting that left two Gwinnett County (Geo.) women dead in response to a 911 call for help. Police say Barbara Baker, 75, explained to a dispatcher that her daughter, Penny Schwartz, 51, was suicidal. A female officer arrived and was invited inside by Baker. Shortly after, Schwartz came down the stairs armed with a handgun and pointed it at the officer, who opened fire. Police say it's not clear how Baker was struck--she may have been trying to shield the officer from her daughter, or her daughter from the officer. Both women were struck several times and died. Read more here. **Update:** The officer responded to the incident alone, unaware that any suicide threats had been made. The mother knew her daughter wanted police to kill her, but it's not clear if this information was given to the dispatcher. For sure, that information wasn't given to the officer. [This incident has similarities to the tragic Pittsburgh PD incident that took the lives of three officers last April.]

July – 2009

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



editor@911Dispatch.com

What's Up?

It's been another instructive month, with examples of good and bad cropping up all across the country. As always, celebrate the "good" and learn from the "bad." As we all know, even the smallest comm center, in the most ordinary city or county can experience the most extraordinary.

Just because you have access to e-mail and the Internet does not mean you're able to ignore the sensibilities of the workplace. Browsing inappropriate Web sites, creating or passing along questionable e-mail and sending gossipy MDT messages is just not right. In theory, dispatchers are just not the type to engage in these things, but judgements *aren't* perfect. Always think about what you write or browse.

Lots of Washington news, including a new FCC chair and lobbying by public safety groups for broadband funding and NG911 action. There is also some action in the D Block frequency auction, although the new FCC could take several months to make a decision on what action to take.

Several good tapes this month, including one from a burglary witness who followed the suspects in his car, and then shot and killed one of the suspects when threatened. Your comm center should have a formal policy of advice for such helpful callers, and at some point it should include the instructions, "Stop following the person/car." There are too many potential risks for the caller, and they're rarely outweighed by the value of the information they're giving.

As always, check these stories on-line for additional material, including Acrobat files and mp3 tapes.

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

Tiny Baby Buried, Named by Police Dispatcher

It was a traumatic event, taking a 911 call from a man last May reporting that he had found a newborn baby in a dumpster out in back of some apartments. But now, that Union City (N. Calif.) dispatcher has helped bring peace to everyone who handled the tragic event, by providing a name for the tiny girl at her burial today: Matea Esperanza--derived from "gift from God" and "hope." She will be wearing a donated white christening dress. A local funeral home has donated space for a memorial service and a gravesite, with a headstone that reads, "Adopted with love by UCPD." Police said the infant still had the umbilical cord attached, and was within blocks from a fire house, and a half-mile from the police station, where the mother could have dropped off the child with no questions asked. No one came forward to claim the child, so the entire police department stepped in. "This case has touched so many people in our department," said Det. Steven Mendez.

FCC Chair Announces Key Appointments

Newly-confirmed FCC chair Julius Genachowski has named a 32-year Navy veteran to head the agency's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, the division that handles much of the FCC's matters pertaining to public safety comm centers. He also named two deputy chiefs for the Bureau. Rear Admiral (ret.) Jamie Barnett left the Navy as a reserve officer in 2008. He was last in the regular Navy as a Dep. Commander at the Pentagon for Naval Education and Training. He spent the last two years as a Sr. Research Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies. He also was in private law practice while serving in the Navy Reserve. Genachowski named FCC veteran David Furth as Deputy Chief of the Bureau. Furth joined the FCC in 1992 and joined the Bureau when it was formed in 2006. He's been acting chief of the Bureau since last January. Also named as a deputy chief was Jennifer Manner, most recently a principal at ZComm Strategies LLC, a telecom policy advisory company. She also was senior counsel to FCC commissioner Kathleen Abernathy, and worked at Worldcom Inc.

OnStar Expands Stolen Vehicle Services

OnStar has expanded its technology for recovering stolen vehicles by adding "Remote Ignition Block" to its menu of services. The company, which provides telematics services to over 5.5 million customers, and is available on 30 models of GM vehicles. OnStar already provides vehicle tracking when a vehicle is stolen, and last September introduced "Stolen Vehicle Slowdown" service, which allows a controlled end to a police "fol-

low” or pursuit. The newest service allows an OnStar advisor to signal the vehicle, so it won’t start once the ignition is turned off. The technique avoids a sudden stop of the vehicle, but prevents the thief from moving the vehicle once they turn off the ignition. All the stolen vehicle services are available to law enforcement dispatchers once they’re able to confirm to OnStar that the vehicle was in fact stolen.

State Audit Skipped Fatal Shooting Incident

A Pennsylvania state audit of the Allegheny County 911 center found several deficiencies, but the investigators who wrote the audit didn’t look into how dispatchers handled the fatal shooting of three Pittsburgh police officers last April. The auditors found the comm center wasn’t properly reviewing dispatcher performance, and doesn’t have specific call-taking protocols. Because the officer murders are still under investigation by police, the auditors were unable to review any logs, tapes or other materials related to the incident to determine if it had been properly handled. A woman called to say she was arguing with her adult son, and an unnamed calltaker asked if her son had guns. The woman said he did, but the information wasn’t passed along to responding officers. ☞

Murder Sentence Ends Long Ordeal

A Jefferson County (Colo.) judge has sentenced Michael Muniz to 84 years in prison for murder and kidnapping, ending a long ordeal for the families of the victims and for Wheatridge police dispatcher Troy Phelps. Muniz pleaded guilty last month after a hung jury, re-trial and appellate court decision delayed the final justice. The case goes back to 1996 when Phelps handled the original telephone call reporting the murder of a local woman. Coincidentally, Phelps was on-duty five years later when Muniz called to taunt police by saying, “I’m on the loose.” Phelps traced that call to a local motel, and police tracked Muniz down and arrested him. Police investigators Muniz was involved in several other murders. District attorney Scott Storey said he was pleased with the outcome. “It’s taken a long time...13 years and two trials,” he said.

Ambulance ‘Staging’ Policy Under Investigation

Toronto (Ont.) police officials are investigating why ambulances were “staged” at three incidents, including one that ended in the death of a 58 year-old man from an apparent cardiac arrest. Police and EMS officials confirmed that its common for EMS crews to arrive at the vicinity of an incident, but then wait at a distance for

police to arrive before moving in to assist the patient. However, in this case, they won’t say what circumstances prompted the ambulance crew to stage away from the scene. They did say that the ambulance arrived within nine minutes, but wouldn’t say how long the ambulance waited before being cleared to move in. The investigation comes at the same time as a civic worker strike in Toronto, but city manager Joe Pennachetti said EMS calls are being answered within a normal response time. ☞

Judge Prohibits Sick-Leave Reporting Policy

A federal judge has issued a permanent injunction against the Columbus (Ohio) Police Department in response to a lawsuit filed by a group of dispatchers, prohibiting the agency from requiring explicit medical information be provided to supervisors when a dispatcher returns from sick leave. In his 30-page decision, U.S. District Court Judge Gregory Frost chided the city’s attorneys over their submitted documents, saying they provided “page after page of argument” on issues that had already been decided by the court. Judge Frost wrote, “The Court frowns upon this course of action because of the waste of time and resources it has necessitated.” The dispatchers filed the lawsuit last year, alleging the police department’s policy required them to divulge their private medical condition to supervisors, which they said is a violation of federal medical privacy laws. Last year the judge extended the original lawsuit filed to include all other affected police employees. In June 2008 the judge issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting the police department from enforcing the sick leave reporting requirement until a full court hearing. ☞

Accidental Shooting Injures Off-Duty Dispatcher

While reaching into the glovebox of her car at a Taco Bell drive-through, Albany (Geo.) dispatcher Jeanita Fulmore picked up her 9mm semi-auto pistol so she could find some money. Fulmore apparently pulled the trigger on the Lugar pistol, it discharged and struck her in the left thigh. Albany police say Fulmore drove herself to a local hospital and also called police to make a report. She was treated and released for her injuries, and police said they confiscated her gun. It’s not clear if she faces any charges, although Georgia law in general allows carrying a firearm in one’s own vehicle. [During Monday’s “Tonight Show,” Conan O’Brien joked, “Doctors said the bullet went through the woman almost as fast as her meal.”]

Man Follows Burglars, Kills One During 911 Call

A witness to the burglary of a propane company in Belen (NM) followed the suspects' vehicle and dialed 911 for help. But during the call the suspects pulled over, and the witness says he was forced to shoot and kill the suspect who came up and broke out his window. The Valencia County district attorney has charged Luke Sanchez with murder, although it's not clear if he'll stand trial, the DA added. Sanchez's attorney claimed the Valencia County dispatcher told Sanchez to follow the suspects, although a review of the logging tape does not confirm that. During the 5-minute call, a radio dispatcher apparently picked up the ringing 911 call to hear Sanchez report a "robbery," and then asked him questions. At one point the female dispatcher asked co-workers to take over her radio channel, and she was continuously updating other dispatchers on the details she obtained from Sanchez. 📞

Workers Dial 911 to Report Man With a Gun

When a 37 year-old man pulled up outside an industrial park in Jeffersontown (Ken.) with a gun, several workers dialed 911 and began giving police dispatchers information. Police arrived within two minutes and began talking to the man, who had arrived looking for his ex-girlfriend, but took the owner of a millwork hostage for an hour before fatally shooting himself. The police department released 17 minutes of logging tapes detailing the calls, which included both calm and panicked people who worked at the industrial park. 📞 📞

Board Orders Dispatcher Reinstated After Firing

A Connecticut mediation board has ruled that the city of Newtown failed to follow proper procedures when it terminated a public safety dispatcher in Oct. 2008, and the town must now reinstate the dispatcher to his former position. Jason Chickos was hired in Oct. 2002, and at some point was disciplined and put on a "last chance" agreement, as agreed in his union's contract. Then in mid-2008 he was accused of not reporting for duty, and a disciplinary hearing was scheduled. However, while Chickos showed up for the hearing, his union's president did not. The city brought in another union member or represent Chickos during the hearing and then later fired Chickos. Upon appeal to the State Board of Mediation and Arbitration, the board found that substitution of the union president was improper, and ordered Chickos back to his job--but not with back pay or benefits. The board also ruled he should once again be placed on the previous last-chance plan. Interestingly, during the state board hearing, members heard testimo-

ny that Chickos actually did not skip work as originally accused. Instead, he had properly swapped a shift with a co-worker, and later paid back the swap.

State Court Rules on 'Skeptical' 911 Call

The Michigan Supreme Court has turned down the request of a Detroit police dispatcher to review a lawsuit that claims she inflicted emotional distress on a 911 caller who had been shot in the head by her ex-boyfriend. The civil lawsuit filed by Lorraine Hayes against Kimberly Langford now can move forward in a local court. Hayes suffered several gunshot wounds in the 2005 incident, but in a medical oddity, was able to dial 911 and explain what had happened, despite her serious head wound. On the logging tape, Langford is skeptical, asked Hayes if she were a "mental patient," and told her she could be arrested for falsely reporting an emergency on 911. Police did respond to the scene, but were delayed because of their own error. Hayes now says she suffers from neurological disorders and paralysis, and suffers psychiatric injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder. The local circuit court dismissed Hayes' claim of gross negligence, based on governmental immunity, and a state appeals court upheld the decision. The local court also dismissed Hayes' claim of intentional infliction of emotional distress. But the appeals court overturned that decision, saying it wasn't clear from the court record that Langford actually did not intend to intentionally cause emotional distress. "There still remained a jury-submissible question of fact concerning whether defendant acted recklessly in her treatment of plaintiff during the 911 calls," the appeals court said. Now, by a 4-3 vote the Supreme Court has declined to hear Langford's appeal of the lower court's decision, which puts the case back into a local court for trial on the "intentional infliction" claim. 📞

Groups Issue Statement Opposing 911 Fund Raids

A trio of public safety groups has issued a joint statement criticizing state officials for using 911 surcharge funds for other purposes, saying they are being "less than honest" with voters and puts the nation's 911 systems at risk. The National Emergency Number Association (NENA), National Association of State 911 Administrators (NASNA) and 9-1-1 Industry Alliance (9IA) didn't mention specific states, but pointed said that using 911 funds for unrelated purposes "breaks the trust established with the public." The groups also said the raids leave little money to maintain current 911 systems, or to fund future NG911 networks. The three groups noted the federal attempts to limit 911 fund raids through the New and Emerging Technologies (NET) 911

Improvement Act of 2008, saying they interpret the law to, “unequivocally bar state and local governments from directly diverting any funds raised for 9-1-1 beyond the 9-1-1 and emergency service delivery purposes. In the statement, the groups pledged to, “ensure that the 9-1-1 system operates as a coordinated and collaborative effort between the public and private sectors.” But they then added, “In return, government must be committed to properly funding the 9-1-1 system and ensuring that all 9-1-1 fees are collected and utilized for their intended purpose as provided by law.” 🗨️ 📞

Telemarketing Calls Arrive on 911 Lines

Dispatchers in Wayne County (Ohio) have been fielding calls from telemarketers since last summer--calls that are arriving on the comm center's 911 lines. County emergency management director Frank Young suspects the calls are being randomly dialed by a company looking for customers, and then hit one or more of the 10-digit telephone numbers the county uses to link up with wireless carriers. “The problem has gone ‘kaboom’ since about last summer, and we’re sick and tired of it,” Young said. He added that the transfer telephone numbers have been put on the national “do not call” list, but that hasn’t ended the telemarketing calls. 🗨️ 📞

Dialing 911 for Cows -- Don't!

A woman who dialed 911 to ask for help rounding up her seven loose cows has been cited by the Dodge County (Wisc.) sheriff for misusing 911. Not only did Tammy Nuttelman ask for deputies to help, but she repeatedly swore at dispatchers who declined to provide assistance. “Yes, this is a **** emergency! I've got seven ****ing cows out loose maybe going to the ****ing highway!” Nuttelman says on the logging tape. County communications director Pat Ninmann told a TV reporter that Nuttelman's language was “completely uncalled for,” and that dispatchers were working a serious accident at the time. 🗨️ 📞

Cellular Switch Had Wrong Numbers

A wireless carrier serving Santa Fe (NM) discovered that its switching computer was mis-programmed to route calls from two sectors of an antenna, and that's why calls from a lost hiker in a wilderness area last month kept being sent to administrative lines at the county's public safety comm center. A state police helicopter that was dispatched to rescue Megumi Yamamoto from Mt. Baldy later crashed and killed her and pilot Sgt. Andy Tingwell when weather closed in around the aircraft. Megumi had used her cellular telephone to call after

becoming separated from her hiking partner. However, since her calls were routed to an admin line, they didn't show her location, and she couldn't accurately describe where she was. County officials claim there was no response delay, but it took several 911 calls and transfers to the state police before the helicopter took off. They now say the wireless carrier performed an audit of all tower sectors in the state, insuring that they all are correctly routed to 911 lines that would provide Phase II location information for incoming calls.

CPR Instructions Save Toddler & Woman

Kudos to Cheektowaga (NY) police dispatcher Jeffery Place, and Charleston County (SC) dispatcher Melissa Gill, who both gave 911 callers CPR instructions to successfully revive victims of a drowning and heart attack respectively. Place, a 30-year veteran, answered the telephone and gave CPR instructions to a father who just found his 3 year-old daughter unconscious in the family's swimming pool. EMS units arrived within five minutes to find Hannah Ludtka breathing again. Watch the video report here. In the second save, Gill gave Bob Schaible CPR instructions for his wife, who suddenly collapsed. EMS units arrived within six minutes and took her to the hospital, where she recovered. 🗨️ 📞

DHS Announces Agencies for Multi-Band Tests

The Department of Homeland Security has announced the 14 agencies that will participate in a test of multi-band radios, that last phase in a project to improve interoperability among public safety and allied agencies. The participating agencies include Amtrak, Boise (Idaho) Fire Department, Hawaii Civil Defense, the Texas National Guard and the U.S. Marshals Service. Each agency will use the radios for at least 30 days, mostly in a command and control situation, preferably with multiple involved agencies. The participants will grade factors such as operating bands, partner agencies and disciplines, interoperable conditions, and geographic landscapes were considered when selecting pilot sites. 🗨️ 📞

Family Files Lawsuit Over Motel Mix-Up

The survivor of a carbon monoxide incident at an Ocean City (Md.) motel in 2006 has filed a federal wrongful death lawsuit against the city and two city EMS workers, saying her husband and young daughter died because of negligence. Yvonne Boughter was staying at the Days Inn motel with her husband and two children, when they were overcome by carbon monoxide from a malfunctioning water heater in the motel basement.

Boughter dialed 911 to report that the family was vomiting and feeling ill, and gave her room number. However, arriving EMS units failed to investigate the family's room, instead going to the motel room of another family who had called from the motel 15 minutes earlier. The Boughters were not found until four hours later, when Yvonne Boughter woke up a second time from her stupor and dialed 911. By then, her husband and daughter were dead. The lawsuit asks for \$20 million in damages.

13

Study Critical of Canada's Wireless 911 Advances

An independent consultant has found that Canada is "late to the game" in establishing E911 location features for cellular callers, and that telecom regulators have been slow to set firm deadlines for implementation. IDC Canada says that over one-half of the nation's 911 calls are now made by the nation's 21 million wireless subscribers. They implied that the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), responsible for telecom regulation, has not taken a leadership role in establishing what is called "Phase II" in the United States. Instead, the CRTC has established only general regulations, and with no firm deadline dates. IDC provided a comparison of wireless E911 in other countries, and concluded, "Canada is significantly lagging behind the U.S. as well as Europe in adopting wireless emergency service technology." 14