

DISPATCH Magazine

On-Line

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

SWATing Caller Claimed Murders, Bomb

The Sarasota County (Fla.) Sheriff's Office is investigating a call from a person who claimed he killed his parents, had a bomb and was suicidal, but investigators determined it was a prank known as SWATing. During a 14-minute call on a non-emergency telephone line last Sunday evening, the caller was hysterical and emotional, gave his name as Ryan and said he was 15 years-old. According to the Herald-Tribune newspaper, 33 deputies and seven crews of fire and EMS personnel responded to the address, but then discovered all the caller's information was false. The residents of the house were not involved in the prank, investigators said. SWATing calls are usually made with the assistance of Internet voice carriers, and sometimes with the assistance of so-called "spoofing" services that allow the caller to display a false telephone number to emergency services. ☹

Highway Patrol Battles Against Proposed Legislation

The Arizona Highway Patrol Association (AHPA) has launched a publicity and lobbying campaign against sweeping legislation that would change the state's personnel rules to be more like the private sector, including reclassifying AHP dispatchers as at-will employees. House Bill 2571 is being promoted as a way to simplify nine separate personnel systems within state government, restructure the grievance and appeal system, and give managers more authority to terminate poor performance employees. However, in its "We Are DPS" campaign, the AHPA points out that law enforcement is a "diverse, specialized field and should not be generalized with other state departments." In turn, civilians are a cost-saving resource for law enforcement and are asked to perform some of the same duties as our sworn officers, the association says. "DPS civilians have promised their integrity to Arizona citizens," the group says, and must pass the same criminal background checks, polygraphs and drug testing as officers before being hired. The AHPA says that state government should protect the integrity of police services. "ONE merit system council provides ONE standard of service in a specialized industry. The public should always trust police work," the group says. Watch a Arizona House committee meeting video on the bill, with testimony against the bill from 23-year veteran dispatch supervisor Patty Simpson. 📺

Wireless Group Criticizes FCC's Text-to-911 Plans

In the wake of proposed rules by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to implement text-to-911 service, a wireless communications group says the FCC doesn't have the legal authority to make the rules, and that SMS has significant limitations in reporting emergencies. The Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA) submitted formal comments earlier this month raising the issues in response to proposed rules the FCC issued last September to quickly deploy text-to-911 services. The CTIA takes makes both legal and technical objections to the FCC's proposals presented in a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) last year, but does acknowledge the "considerable" benefits of IP communications for those with hearing disabilities.

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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?

Virtually every agency records its incoming telephone calls, both for immediate reference by dispatchers and to archive them for use by DA's, defense attorneys and others. But how about recording the out-going telephone calls that a dispatcher makes? Legal? In Florida, the answer is "No," unless you have the called person's consent. An appellate court ruled that a dispatcher who called a home where a woman reportedly was being assaulted should have obtained consent to record the call. Without consent, nothing from the recording could later be introduced as evidence in a trial. Check your state's privacy laws and your procedures for out-going calls and call-backs.

Significantly, President Obama signed payroll tax legislation that also included the long-sought allocation of spectrum to public safety. Now, the so-called D Block of spectrum will be held in trust by public safety and used to create a nationwide mobile broadband network that can support all types of data, and in the future will support voice. The legislation did come with a give-back of frequencies in the TV band, which sparked some criticism and disgust from agencies using that band. However, overall, it was a big win for public safety.

The Arizona Highway Patrol is taking care of its civilian staff, including its dispatchers, in the midst of legislation that would change retirement benefits for non-sworn personnel. The AHP is lobbying the legislature, but also taking its case to the public. Their actions are rare among public safety organizations, who traditionally don't fight for civilian benefits.

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

The group says any interim NG911 solution should be "voluntary, collaborative (and) industry-drive," rather than a mandated process focused on short-term goals. First, the CTIA claims the FCC does not currently have the authority to regulate SMS messaging, disputing the FCC's claims that existing law provides the authority. The group picks apart the FCC's specific claims of authority in the NPRM. The CTIA also raises specific technical concerns about SMS as a way to contact emergency services. "Wireless carriers, equipment manufacturers, and Public Safety entities all have highlighted numerous shortcomings of SMS-to-911 as an interim solution," the CTIA wrote, and urged the FCC not mandate any interim text-to-911 solution based on SMS. The shortcoming includes possible transmission delays, the sender receives no acknowledgement of delivery and no intelligent routing. ☞

Dispatcher Suspended, Man Still Missing

A nine-year veteran Wood County (Wisc.) dispatcher has been suspended for 30 days without pay for mishandling a 911 call reporting a man limping along a highway in the early morning. That man, Greg Senn, was reported missing by his family later in the day, and has still not been found despite extensive searching. Dispatcher Brian Turner fielded the call (mp3) from a passerby at 6:25 a.m, but did not use an interpretation service to obtain information from the Spanish-speaking caller, and failed to send a Grand Rapids officer to investigate the man. He also failed to log the call and tell police about the call during the search and investigation, despite his position as a part-time Grand Rapids police officer. A letter of discipline (pdf) said Turner, "failed to handle the call in an appropriate manner," but did not mention Turner's specific errors. Comm center manager Kelly Zenz told reporters that "all aspects" of the call were considered to justify the discipline. "In that type of incident somebody should have been sent for a welfare check on that person," he said. After serving the unpaid suspension, Turner must sign a corrective plan, and the discipline letter warned that future errors may result in termination. Turner has the right to appeal the discipline, but has not indicated if he will do so. The Senn family has criticized the discipline, saying they believe Turner should have been fired. The 911 call was revealed a month after Senn disappeared, when a police officer was questioning the 911 caller about an unrelated incident. Turner was then put on paid leave during the internal investigation that led to his discipline. ☞

Review: Tactical Spanish for Dispatchers

To be clear, there is no simple way to learn a foreign language, especially for a speciality such as law enforcement or emergency communications. You must study, listen and practice to gain a useful level of communications with non-English speakers. But now the second edition of "Tactical Spanish" by Jose Blanco has been published, providing an organized and convenient method of learning the necessary words and phrases for handling 911 calls and other situations a public safety dispatcher might encounter. The product consists of a pocket-sized, spiral-bound book packed with short lessons and translations, and a set of three audio CDs of pronunciations. Author Blanco is a former police officer who developed a Spanish language book several years ago. Now he has partnered with Lexis-Nexis to market this updated edition. The book is organized into short lessons on language, grammar and words at the front, and categories of common phrases at the back. Blanco includes people/vehicle descriptions, making stops and arrests, reports and emergency communications, "danger expressions," slang, and gang information. Each section is organized into side-by-side columns of English and Spanish phrases, with the Spanish pronunciation included. The emergency communications section of the book is just 20 of the book's 151 pages. But translations from many other sections can also be useful to dispatchers. The CD set's recordings are organized into sections like the book. Each recording consists of Blanco pronouncing the English-Spanish translations twice for clarity. I have a couple of quibbles: the book is printed on very thin paper that might tear out or get worn over time as you turn the pages to find translations. Also, when using an application like iTunes to play the CD recordings, the recordings aren't titled or otherwise identified. Fortunately Blanco states the section name at the very beginning of each recording, which makes browsing easier. The book/CD set is available now from Lexis-Nexis on-line for \$24. — Gary Allen, Editor

Challenges ID'd For Mobile Network

A federal examination of a proposed nationwide mobile broadband network for public safety has determined it will not support mission-critical voice communications for the foreseeable future, forcing agencies to continue using their separate—and non-interoperable—radio systems to handle everyday communications. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) completed the report at the request of Congress, and in their 62-page report released yesterday said there were many challenges to creating a broadband network—ensuring the network's interoperability, reliability, and security; obtaining adequate funds to build and maintain it; and

creating a governance structure. The GAO also focused on handheld radios, saying they often cost thousands of dollars because, "market competition is limited and manufacturing costs are high." The GAO determined that, "Public safety agencies cannot exert buying power in relationship to device manufacturers, which may result in the agencies overpaying for LMR devices." The GAO based its conclusions partly on interviews with officials from six of the 22 jurisdictions that were granted permission by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to begin deploying 700 MHz broadband systems. ☞

VP Takes Lead for Spectrum Bill Signing

The White House was in the spotlight today for public safety communications, as President Obama signed legislation that will allocate spectrum and funding for a nationwide wireless network, and Vice-President Biden met with public safety leaders to discuss a new report on the economic benefits of wireless broadband. After years of lobbying, both houses of Congress approved legislation last week that allocates the D Block to public safety, would provide \$7 billion in funding for a wireless network, and set up grand funding for NG911 implementation. This morning Obama signed the tax cut legislation which included the spectrum provisions as a rider. During a 10-minute speech prior to the signing, he did not mention the spectrum provisions, but talked only about the economy and the effects of the tax cut. Standing behind him were ordinary citizens, not public safety officials. In the afternoon, Biden met with law enforcement officials, firefighters and public safety groups in-person and by conference call, and discussed the spectrum and wireless network provisions of the tax legislation. He also briefed them on a new report (pdf) from the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) that discusses the positive benefits of wireless broadband for public safety as well as jobs, growth, and investment. According to the White House, the report, "illustrates the economic impact of President Obama's goal of doubling the amount of spectrum available for wireless broadcast over ten years, while adopting a nationwide inter operable wireless network." Biden told the public safety officials, "I've been working on changing the way we allocate spectrum for a long time, because a smarter system is good for our economy, good for innovation, and vital to keeping our communities as well as our cops, firefighters and EMTs safe."

London Ambulance 999 Glitch Revealed

The London (UK) Ambulance Service has confirmed press reports that last October a computer glitch prevented some emergency 999 calls from ringing in to some calltakers, the result of the change from British Summer Time. According to the Health Service Journal (reg.), over 70 emergency calls were not answered during a 25-minute period on October 30th. Apparently they became invisible on-screen when the “fall back” fall time change was implemented. However, the technical staff were able to identify all of the missed 999 calls, and ambulance service officials said no life-threatening patients were affected. Read more about the incident [here](#).

FCC Increases Scrutiny on VoIP 911 Outages

Acknowledging the increasing use of VoIP telephone services to make 911 emergency calls, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) this week established a requirement for providers to report certain network outages. Previously, only wired and wireless carriers have been required to provide outage reports that might affect 911 services. “The new rules will help ensure that the country’s critical communications infrastructure remains available in times of crisis,” the FCC said in a press release. Almost one-third of the nation’s 87 million residential telephone subscriptions are based on VoIP connections, the FCC noted, potentially resulting in 75 million calls to 911 each year. The commission noted several VoIP outages over the past two years, none required to be reported to the FCC. Both the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) and National Emergency Number Association (NENA) applauded the FCC’s action. However, both also said they hoped the FCC would eventually extend the outage reporting requirements to broadband providers. APCO also said the FCC should take steps to provide real-time outage reports to affected public safety answering points (PSAP) so they could better handle 911 calls. The Report and Order approved by the FCC sets reporting criteria and thresholds, outlines the reporting process and what information to be reported, and provides confidentiality for the report information. **Update:** The FCC released the full Report & Order (pdf) on Feb. 21st. 📄

Congress Passes Epic Spectrum Bill

After years of lobbying by public safety groups, today the U.S. House and Senate approved legislation that will fulfill the spectrum needs to construct a nationwide wireless network that will support broadband voice and data. The bill also includes NG911 funding, a frequency band give-back, TV band auction provisions, and the creation of a spectrum governance agency. The spec-

trum provisions were tied to a tax bill that had become a major point of contention for both political parties, but which passed by a relatively wide margin. Most significantly, the bill allocates the D Block of spectrum directly to public safety, a 20 MHz band that had originally been set for auction to a commercial enterprise in 2008. The bill also requires an auction of certain vacated television spectrum, with \$7 billion of the auction proceeds going to fund a nationwide public safety wireless network. Legislators wanted spectrum in exchange for the D Block allocation, and after extensive negotiations, compromised with a give-back of the T-Band (470-512 MHz) being used by agencies in major metropolitan areas. The affected agencies would have 11 years to fully vacate the band under the new bill. But the give-back news sparked cries of “sell-out” from some agencies now using the T-band for large networks. Analysts said legislators originally wanted spectrum give-back from the 150-470 MHz band, then shifted to 420-470 MHz and to 700 MHz band, before landing on the T-band. In addition, T-band users say they should not be subject to the FCC’s current narrowbanding mandate, since the money spent will be wasted when the frequencies are given back. Because the original tax bill is high-profile, it should be signed by the President very quickly. The Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) applauded the Congressional action, and thanked its supporters from both political parties. Motorola also hailed the bill’s passage, but for economic reasons, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police also praised the action.

Congress Votes On Spectrum, Funding Set

Members of Congress have agreed to include wireless spectrum provisions in a hotly-debated bill to extend a payroll tax reduction, possibly giving public safety dedicated frequencies for a nationwide network and \$6 billion in funding to build and operate it. The entire legislative package is due for a vote on Friday, and indications are that it will pass and be signed by President Obama. Public safety groups have been lobbying Congress for over six years to obtain dedicated spectrum and funding, but the nation’s economy has pushed the proposed legislation down the list of Congressional priorities. Public safety amendments have been included in previous proposed legislation, but were always removed before final passage. Just this week Republicans and Democrats agreed to compromise on legislation to extend a reduction in worker payroll taxes. Long-time Congressional supporters of the public safety D Block spectrum plan managed to insert the spectrum language within the payroll tax legislation, part of an amendment to auction off a block of spectrum now assigned to television broadcasters. Under the plan agreed to by Congressional negotiators on Wednesday, the Federal

Communications Commission (FCC) would auction off the TV band spectrum to commercial companies, raising up to \$16 billion. The FCC would assign the D Block of spectrum to public safety, and Congress would allocate about \$6 billion of the auction proceeds to build the nationwide public safety network. The legislation also includes several other public safety sections, including funding for radio and NG911 projects. If the legislation passes, it might take the FCC several years to hold the auction and for radio network funding to become available to public safety. Read reaction to the proposal from two public safety groups after the break. [↗](#)

Criticism Of 911 Call Handling After Deaths

The handling of a 911 call to a Washington state communications center is just one inquiry into a complicated and long-running case that involves two states, several state and county agencies, a missing woman and the welfare of two young children. In its simplest terms, a state court allowed Josh Powell supervised visits with his two sons, ages 5 and 7. But under pressure from Utah police investigating his missing wife, and his alleged possession of pornography, Powell doused his Pierce County home in gasoline on Feb. 5th. When a visitation supervisor arrived at Powell's house with the two children, Powell let the children inside, then slammed the front door, locking out the supervisor. Within minutes he ignited the gasoline, turning the house into an inferno, killing himself and his two boys. Outside, the visitation supervisor immediately dialed 911 and tried to explain the situation to a calltaker at the Law Enforcement Support Agency (LESA) comm center. In an interview with NBC's "Dateline NBC," 18-year LESA dispatcher Dave Lovrak admitted that he misinterpreted the supervisor's information, not realizing it was so urgent.

Opposition to Florida Training Bill Amendment

The husband of a Florida kidnap-murder victim has joined the state's chapter of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) to urge legislators amend a proposed bill that would allow law enforcement officers to work as dispatchers without hands-on training. House Bill 1227 was introduced to allow public safety agency to retain some flexibility in staffing communications centers when dispatchers aren't available. It has already been approved by two legislative committees, and was scheduled for a third committee hearing last Tuesday. Currently, the state's dispatchers are working to complete mandatory training certification before an Oct. 2012 deadline. Their training includes a hands-on component that law enforcement officers would not have to complete under the proposed bill. But Nathan Lee, husband of Denise Lee who was

murdered in Jan. 2008, says in a letter to legislators that, "Unfamiliarity with the use of the CAD system is EXACTLY what allowed Denise to be murdered." He noted that the calltaker in the incident was "confused and untrained with entering call details into the CAD and instead would write the call details on a piece of paper and yell them across the room to the dispatchers." The APCO chapter also has urged the legislator to include a hands-on training component before allowing law enforcement officers to dispatch. Download (pdf) the House committee's information packet on the bill here, and a letter to a legislator from Nathan Lee, Denise's father and Denise's mother-in-law here. [↗](#)

Court: Dispatcher Needed Consent to Record

A Florida appellate court has overturned the assault conviction of a man who was telephoned by a county 911 dispatcher, saying state law narrowly restricts the non-consent recording of out-going calls to those numbers that have already dialed 911. In this case, the original 911 call came from a woman reporting her daughter was being assaulted by her husband, and gave the Escambia County dispatcher the telephone number for the daughter at another location. The dispatcher then called that number, which was answered by the husband. There was screaming and yelling in the background of the call, and the dispatcher heard the husband verbally threaten to shoot his wife and himself. Deputies responded and arrested the husband for the assault and drug possession. The husband appealed his guilty plea, saying the call to his house was recorded, which is not permitted by Florida law without his consent. The District Court of Appeal agreed, saying the legislature had specifically granted certain exceptions to the state's prohibition on recording phone calls, including incoming 911 calls, and out-going calls from a dispatcher to the same telephone number that dialed 911 (in the case a call was dropped, for example). The court noted that dispatchers can make out-going calls and record them, but they must obtain the consent of the person with whom they speak. In this case, the number dialed was different than the original 911 call, and consent was not obtained from the husband to record the call. [↗](#)

Logging Tape Protections Proposed in Calif.

A former Los Angeles police department dispatcher, and current California legislator is proposing that 911 logging tapes involving medical incidents be withheld from the public. Assemblywoman Norma Torres says 911 calls like the one just made by friends of Demi Moore should not be made public, considering the confidential nature of the incidents. Torres is serving her second term in the legislature, and represents parts of Ontario, Pomona, Montclair and Chino in southern California.

She spent 18 years with LAPD, was elected to the Pomona city council, and was then inspired to run for state office. "When it comes to medical calls, there ought to be some standards and those standards should apply to 911 calls," Torres told reporters. Right now, California law only allows certain information to be redacted from logging tapes, including names of juveniles and certain witnesses, and investigative information. Torres has not yet introduced a bill in the legislature, but is seeking support from fellow legislators. 📧

Dispatchers On Strike the Night of Delay

A Toronto (Ont.) coroner's inquest heard testimony from EMS comm center supervisors that a union-called strike may have forced them to perform several tasks at once, on the same night a heart attack victim waited 35 minutes for an ambulance. James Hearst, 59, appeared intoxicated to a caller in the lobby of an apartment building in June 2009, and an ambulance crew decided to stage and wait for police for 20 minutes, rather than immediately respond to the scene. But EMS dispatcher Ryan Leblanc testified Monday that he may have been performing multiple tasks when he took the 911 call reporting Hearst. "A lot of...jobs were condensed so that one person would be doing more than one job," he told the panel. It's not clear from the testimony if staffing contributed to the delayed response. 📧

Bureaucracy Issues Feature List For Radio

A deeply-buried subcommittee within the federal government has issued an "extended essay" on the subject of nationwide, public safety communications, documenting its desirable features, while not breaking any new ground. The examination was prompted last June by a request from the country's Chief Technology Officer to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). In turn, the NIST assigned the task to the Visiting Committee on Advanced Technology (VCAT), who handed it off to the subcommittee on Public Safety Networks. The final report notes the required flexibility, use of IP protocols, backward and forward compatibility, security and ruggedization features. It also said that a future system would require an app development process. 📧