

CALL TAKING/DISPATCH

Service Description

Central Lane 9-1-1 is the communications gateway for regional emergency services, connecting 89% of Lane County with the public safety assistance they need. Trained Communication Specialists calmly guide callers through crisis, obtain and relay vital information, and provide radio support to police, fire and emergency medical responders. As a regional communications center, 9-1-1 services are provided for 30 of central Lane County's 39 public safety (police, fire and emergency medical services) agencies.

Central Lane also manages non-emergency calls for Eugene Police and non-urgent medical transport requests for the four public ambulance providers. Call-takers triage all calls and either route to the appropriate dispatch entity so that public safety responders can be sent, answer and/or resolve questions over the phone, or refer the caller on to other public agencies or resources for further assistance. Dispatchers keep track of response unit availability and location, direct response teams safely into crisis situations, supply arrest and other information needed in the field, and coordinate backup resources from other jurisdictions as needed.

Emergency call taking is funded by the 9-1-1 telephone tax. Non-emergency call taking and City of Eugene dispatch services are paid for through the General Fund. Dispatch services provided to other public safety agencies are reimbursed via contracts for service. The total FY07 budget for the service is \$6,645,870 with 57.69 FTE.

Historic Perspective

- 1984 Functional consolidation of police, fire and emergency medical services call taking/dispatch.
- 1985 9-1-1 operational on a county-wide basis.
- 1991 Long-Range Public Safety Plan adopted.
- 1996 Enhanced 9-1-1 service (automated display of a caller's phone number and address) implemented.
- 1997 Automated answering system installed for incoming, non-emergency phone lines.
- 2000 New Central Lane Communications Building was completed.
- 2002 Converted to new Emergency Medical Dispatch system to facilitate a Quality Assurance program for the Center and tiered deployment (graduated response based on level of need) for EMS.
- 2004 Implemented new computer aided dispatch (CAD) system – the first phase of the regional AIRS conversion project.
- 2006 Communications Operational Assessment completed by consultants with recommendations under review for action plan development.

Citizen Involvement

The Police Commission serves in an advisory capacity to the Mayor and Council and the City Manager for policing issues and the periodic review of departmental policies and proposals. The Commission is also intended to improve two-way communications between the police and the community to reduce misunderstandings regarding the nature of adopted police policies, practices and approaches. The Budget Committee and the City Council review the entire annual Public Safety budget, including Call Taking /Dispatch.

Lane County's Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) association has partnered with Central Lane Communications to provide both 9-1-1 call taking and radio dispatch back up support. In 2002, an alliance with members of the speech and hearing impaired community was formed to provide TTY training and testing for Center personnel, and in turn, public education and outreach for citizens to encourage direct access to public safety services. In 2006, the federally sponsored Citizens Emergency Response Team (CERT) training was expanded locally to include a section focusing on 9-1-1 services and a tour of the Center.

Customer Input

Allegations, inquiries and commendations received from customers are tracked and receive follow-up. To ensure the service meets the operational needs of the agencies it serves, staff meets regularly with the Eugene police, fire and emergency medical command teams. Quarterly meetings held with users of Fire/EMS dispatch service provide a forum for discussion on new procedures, radio issues, and performance standards in place for EMS call taking and fire dispatch.

Mission

Central Lane 9-1-1 is the communications gateway for regional emergency services. The Division contributes to the Eugene Police Department's mission: "To enhance the quality of life in our city by providing quality police services. We work in partnership with the community to promote safety and security, enforce laws, prevent crime, and safeguard the constitutional rights of all people."

Outcomes

- The safety of the public and their property is improved by responding to calls in a timely and professional manner.

- The safety of the public and public safety personnel is improved by handling calls and providing timely and effective dispatch of personnel and equipment.
- A trained, well-equipped staff is available to respond to the in-coming call load.
- Public safety problems are resolved and a feeling of safety and assurance is increased by providing information and referral in a courteous and effective manner.

Operating Principles

- INTEGRITY-- We act consistently with our values and our Code of Ethics.
- HONESTY-- We are truthful in character and behavior.
- ACCOUNTABILITY-- We are answerable to the public and each other for our actions and take responsibility for them.
- TRUSTWORTHINESS-- We honor our word and keep our commitments.
- FAIRNESS-- Our actions and decisions are based on reason and law equally applied to all.
- SERVICE-- We provide meaningful work for the betterment of our community.
- TEAMWORK-- We recognize we can accomplish more and achieve better results by working in groups to take advantage of our diverse skills, abilities, and perspectives.
- PROFESSIONALISM-- We understand the importance of individual excellence in our many roles and adhere to the standards and expectations of our profession.
- RESPECT-- We treat all persons with dignity and honor their rights under law.
- INNOVATION-- We are open to new ideas to improve the quality and productivity of our work.

Current Operating Environment

External Trends

Coordination of Emergency Preparedness

On a State level, Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) have increased responsibility to facilitate emergency preparedness, provide interoperability to facilitate emergency preparedness, provide interoperability to other agency's communication systems and coordinate emergency response. Ongoing strategic planning addressing Eugene's regional role in the statewide communications infrastructure and the City of Eugene services provided as a section of EPD need to be included as part of the overall State plan.

Funding for PSAP Operations

More adequate funding for PSAP operations (legislative and other) must be identified and secured. There is no stable resource to address current needs for the critical communications radio infrastructure. Grant funding has provided some resources to move toward meeting Federal Communication Center (FCC) mandates and replace portions of the aging radio system. However, issues of capacity, coverage and redundancy in the metro area have not been addressed. Equipment replacement funds should be part of any future equipment purchases or upgrades.

Phase II Implementation

The FCC has mandated wireless location technology for 9-1-1 services. With deregulation, more providers are entering the telecommunications market. Considerable effort is required on the part of the service and the telecommunications market. Considerable effort is required on the part of the service and the telecommunications industry to coordinate multiple sources and formats of data. A portion of 9-1-1 taxes are currently earmarked for this purpose.

Responder Resources

Staff prioritizes calls according to established criteria and information provided by the caller. Because emergency calls are the first priority, non-emergency callers are put on hold for increasingly longer amounts of time. Although the community puts a high priority on responding to community livability issues, limited resources also increase the time that callers must wait for responding agencies to attend to non-emergency calls. The increased use of cellular phones has caused a 21 percent increase in unintended calls to 9-1-1. As calls for service increase and responder resources shrink, customer satisfaction with non-emergency call response may decrease.

Internal Conditions

Staffing Needs

Sufficient staffing has not been maintained to cover all levels of call-handling and dispatch services within EPD, for the PSAP, and with external dispatch customers. In addition, staffing necessary to support the communications operation is not adequately addressed within the current budget (e.g. technical, quality assurance, training and other administrative support.)

Recruitment Issues

The complex set of skills required for call-taker and dispatcher make recruitment extremely difficult in this low-unemployment environment. Job requirements and regular turnover equate to significant challenges in staffing call-taking and dispatch functions (insufficient time and personnel to provide adequate training), as well as preparing current staff for the future.

Funding Issues

A flat rate telephone tax that funds 9-1-1 services has been extended to 2008. Growth in wireless communications, additional phone lines for home computers and growth in the housing industry have all had an impact on revenue received. In addition, a significant portion of the tax must fund the equipment necessary to keep pace with technology (i.e. receiving 9-1-1 calls via VoIP). Conversely, actions taken by the State legislature in 2001 and 2002 capped the flat rate tax and diverted more than \$9 million from the program. Operating reserves have been depleted and the program has been reduced by three positions. Any further reduction or diversion of funds will require service-level changes and/or supplemental fees by agencies served. In coordination with local officials and 9-1-1 managers statewide, the service is involved in an educational effort with the Legislature to prevent any further erosion of the program.

Employee Turnover

High turnover affects the quality of service and is expensive. To hire, train and certify an entry-level employee is time-intensive and costs approximately \$41,000 per employee. Training beyond entry level adds additional significant expense. Turnover for 9-1-1 centers is typically 25%. Following the use of a number of internal short-term strategies, by mid-FY06 turnover was reduced to 9% for probationary (those in training) and 0% for non-probationary employees. A 2006 consultant's study cited a lack of administrative staff, a laborious training program, and need for center-specific policies and procedures as core contributing factors to turnover. A police department strategic initiative has been developed to address the recommendations of the consultant's study.

Equipment Improvements

As a result of an upgrade in the regional criminal justice system, a secure link to the digital logging recorder is now available. Users save time by having immediate access to 9-1-1 and dispatch recordings needed for investigations, prosecution, and training. In June 2006, the Center successfully implemented a major 9-1-1 phone system upgrade to digital technology. This upgrade provides the Center with a secure 'Next Generation 9-1-1' ready system.

Information System

The service depends on computer-aided dispatch (CAD) and computerized criminal justice records provided by the Area Information Records System (AIRS) which serves a consortium of public agencies. In addition to CAD, the consortium has secured a jail management and a fire records system. Automated field reporting, law enforcement records and court will be implemented in the second phase of the AIRS conversion.

Performance Measures

Core Processes

Manage Non-Emergency Call Taking/Dispatch

- Provide call taking services for both regional 9-1-1 needs and local intake for EPD and fire dispatch agencies.
- Average lengths of time callers are on hold.

Manage Emergency Call Taking/Dispatch

- Provide call taking services for both regional 9-1-1 needs and local intake for EPD and fire dispatch agencies.

Total System

Effectiveness

- Percent of calls handled appropriately as measured by:
 - a) times appropriate information is requested by call taker, and
 - b) times information is accurately relayed to responder and caller.

Efficiency

- Average time to answer incoming phone lines compared to NAED (National Academy of Emergency Dispatch).
- Average time from call receipt to dispatch for high priority police incidents compared to median ICMA city.

Financial

- Percent of the regional 9-1-1 call-taking operating cost covered by regional 9-1-1 tax revenue.

Customer Satisfaction

- Percent of customer survey respondents who report they are satisfied or very satisfied with the service compared to NENA's national survey.

Strategy 1: Contribute to the safety of the public and their property by responding to calls in a timely and professional manner.

Objectives: Answer emergency calls within guidelines (two rings) for national accreditation by December 2007 (refer National Academy of Emergency Dispatch, NAED).

Achieve NAED accreditation for emergency medical call processing performance by December 2007.

Work Activities:

- Measure and report emergency call answering times each quarter.
- Conduct quality assurance review of emergency medical calls.
- Document calls handled and screened vs. calls entered.
- Assess steps Center must take to meet accreditation requirements.

Strategy 2: Contribute to the safety of the public and public safety personnel by handling calls and providing timely and effective dispatch of personnel and equipment.

Objectives: Provide police dispatch services for all calls meeting dispatch criteria.

Provide fire dispatch services for all calls meeting dispatch criteria.

By December 2007, implement a quality assurance program to measure dispatch performance for Police, EMS, and Fire.

By June 2007, replace back-up operations at 1820 Roosevelt via 'hot back up' utilizing local communications centers.

Work Activities:

- Measure and report police calls dispatched each quarter.
- Measure and report Fire/EMS calls dispatched each quarter.
- Establish baseline standards for dispatch performance.
- Implement radio system upgrade, improving connectivity between public safety communication centers.

Strategy 3: Maintain a trained, well-equipped staff that is available to respond to the in-coming call load.

Objectives: Manage the hiring and training program to achieve a dropout rate of 30% or less for probationary employees in 2007.

Achieve an attrition rate for non-probationary employees of less than 11% in 2006 and 2007.

Work Activities:

- Analyze the results of recruitment and selection processes; adjust as needed.
- Maintain continuous hiring processes through 2007.
- Improve outreach efforts based on best practices in other 9-1-1 operations.
- Develop position recommendations from Operational Assessment study.

Strategy 4: Resolve public safety problems and promote a feeling of safety and assurance by providing information and referral in a courteous and effective manner.

Objectives: Establish standards for non-emergency call handling and provide responses to information and referral requests within accepted timeframes 90% of the time.

Work Activities:

- Develop Action Plan (recommended by consultant's Operational Assessment) to include refining, updating and implementing operations and procedures.
- Set baseline for call processing.
- Establish standards and timelines for performance review.

Call Taking/Dispatch System Map

CORE PROCESSES

Manage Non-Emergency Call Taking/Dispatch

Manage Emergency Call Taking/Dispatch

SUPPORTING PROCESSES:

Provide public education
 Certify and train telecommunicators
 Trained personnel
 Manage automated systems
 Coordinate call-taking/dispatch
 Manage human resources
 Develop policies and procedures
 Manage financial resources with
 Service Levels

FEEDBACK:

Surveys
 Neighborhood groups
 Citizen letters
 Informal feedback
 Contract/funding renewal
 Allegations, inquiries, commendations
 Fire Defense Board
 Briefings
 Command meetings

OUTPUTS:

Information
 Referral
 Problem resolution
 Conflict resolution
 Counseling
 Pre-arrival instructions
 Dispatch Instructions
 CAD record
 Audio Records

DIRECT CUSTOMERS:

Callers
 Secondary dispatchers
 Contracted Fire/EMS
 agencies
 Police
 Fire
 EMS
 Community Service
 Officers
 Emergency Management

STAKEHOLDERS:

9-1-1 User Board
 Citizens
 City Council
 Police Commission
 Media
 Legislature
 Public Safety Coordinating Council
 Fire Defense Board
 Fire Dispatch Users
 Oregon APCO/NENA

FEEDBACK:

Electronic Tracking
 Systems

Regular Customer
 Feedback meetings
 1-1 meetings

Telephone & E-mail

SUPPLIERS:

Callers
 Public safety personnel
 Other City staff
 Vendors
 Regional public safety
 and governmental
 agencies

INPUTS:

Information and requests
 regarding emergency and
 non-emergency situations
 Communications equipment
 Labor hours
 Computer equipment
 E911 record
 Operating funds
 EPD Strategic Planning
 Processes