Virginia Information Technologies Agency

VITA

9-1-1 Call for Service
Dispatching Best Practice

Commonwealth of Virginia
9-1-1Call For Service Dispatching
Best Practice

ABSTRACT: This document has been created to serve as a best practice for 9-1-1 request for service dispatching in the commonwealth. It is an overview of how a telecommunicator is to provide dispatch services. This is accomplished by analyzing, prioritizing and processing calls while sustaining contact with first responders to ensure safe, efficient and effective response in accordance with local, state, tribal or federal regulations.

This publication serves as a recommended informational resource. As explained in the foreword, use or implementation of any content in this document is optional and voluntary.

Developed by the
Integrated Services Program
in consultation with the
Best Practice Steering Committee
and/or appropriate workgroup(s)

Table of Contents

Foreword

A best practice is a generally accepted method that, when followed, shows consistent superior results based on experience and/or research. Best practices should be used as a benchmark by which to maintain quality, and are an alternative to mandatory legislated standards. When developing a best practice, it is important to identify the core principle, purpose and/or goal of the practice, while allowing flexibility for how it is implemented so it remains relevant to a variety of local conditions. Also, when best practices are considered for implementation on a wide scale, the document's developers must remain aware of sites with minimal to no resources, and consider how those sites will be supported in order to create the desired outcomes.

This best practices document was developed through a collaborative effort by ISP staff, the Best Practices (BP) Steering Committee and applicable workgroups or committees, as well as individual subject matter experts (SME) who have volunteered their time and insights.

These are consensus best practices, and their use is voluntary. Management of PSAPs is a local responsibility. Decisions regarding applicable content and practices, including whether and/or how a Virginia locality should implement this best practice, are strictly local decisions. VITA and the 9-1-1 Services Board assume no responsibility or liability for any such decisions or other use of this document. This best practice is not intended to be an exclusive resource; the reader should also consider other qualifications, standards, or documents related to this topic. All best practices are subject to change and will be reviewed by ISP staff and/or the BP Steering Committee at least annually following its publication date.

Outside of scheduled review, comments regarding VITA ISP best practices are accepted at any time and can be submitted to Stefanie.McGuffin@vita.virginia.gov. If the comment includes a recommended change, it is requested to accompany the recommendation with supporting material. If you have a question regarding any portion of this best practice, VITA ISP will consider and/or respond to your question in accordance with applicable law, policies, and procedures.

Acknowledgements

Best Practice Workgroup

Best Practice Steering Committee

Abbreviations, Acronyms & Definitions

Note: A complete listing of 9-1-1 specific definitions can be found on the NENA website and is called the NENA Master Glossary of 9-1-1 Terminology.

For the purpose of this best practice the following applies:

Term	Meaning
Agency	The entity that has administrative and operational authority over the Public Safety Answering Point.
Apparatus	A tool or piece of equipment used for specific activities. In this document it refers to fire and rescue equipment.
Call type/nature code	An acronym or other abbreviated combination of alphanumeric characters used to describe the nature of the real world event that is being reported. Type codes typically differ between disparate PSAPs and public safety agencies.
Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)	A computer based system, which aids PSAP Telecommunicators by automating selected dispatching and record keeping activities.
Dual Response	Response to an incident by emergency services responders from multiple agencies or jurisdictions.
Dispatch	The sending of someone or something to a destination or for a purpose.
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	A Memorandum of Understanding is a document that expresses mutual accord on an issue between two or more parties.
Mutual Aid	Written agreement between agencies and/or jurisdictions in which they agree to assist one another upon request, by furnishing personnel and equipment.
PSAP/PSCC	Public Safety Answering Point / Public Safety Communications Center - An entity responsible for receiving 9-1-1 calls and processing those calls according to a specific operational policy.
Reporting Party (RP)	For the purposes of this document is an individual who presents an incident to a PSAP or PSCC with expectation of a public safety response. The reporting mechanism may come from a variety of sources to include a phone, in person request, text message using 911 software, or any other means. "Reporting party" is not intended to limit the method in which contact is made.
Request for service, (referred to as "incident")	An event or occurrence that starts the process of call taking, dispatching and emergency response.
Telecommunicator AKA: call taker, dispatcher	Person employed by a PSAP and/or an EMD Service Provider qualified to answer incoming emergency telephone calls and/or provides for the appropriate emergency response either directly or through communication with the appropriate PSAP.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Scope

This best practice defines the recommended minimum steps and decision points for the dispatching of public safety requests for service received by a public safety answering point (PSAP), also commonly referred to as public safety communications centers (PSCC). This document covers the dispatching process from initial report through completion of the incident. It also covers in general, the agencies' responsibilities in developing a well-organized and documented process including applicable resources for telecommunicators. This document is a next-step compliment to the Virginia Information Technologies Agency's (VITA) *Public Safety Call Processing Best Practice*[1]

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to assist the PSAP/PSCC with establishing the method by which an incident is processed in the most effective manner. Telecommunicators must follow agency directives. The information presented in this document are suggestions for inclusion in those directives.

Chapter 2: Agency Responsibilities

This chapter outlines the agency's responsibilities for establishing the steps involved in receiving and processing incidents.

2.1 General Agency Responsibilities

The agency shall provide the telecommunicator pertinent training and opportunities for continuing education. At a minimum, telecommunicators must successfully complete required training (law enforcement dispatching) through the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services within the first 24 months of employment. This training and certification should occur within the first 12 months of employment or as soon as possible. Agencies utilizing an emergency medical dispatch (EMD) protocol should provide all telecommunicators with training and certification on the system in use. Telecommunicators with access to the Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN) system shall obtain certification through the Virginia State Police. Also, in setting training programs and performance evaluations for telecommunicators, agencies should utilize the information found in the *Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Telecommunicators* established by the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) [2]

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[1] Public Safety Call Processing Best Practice, June 2017,
http://www.vita.virginia.gov/media/vitavirginiagov/integrated-services/pdf/PSCPPv2.pdf
[2] Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Telecommunicators, APCO ANS 3.103.2-2015, July 14, 2015,
https://www.apcointl.org/doc/911-resources/apco-standards/75-minimum-training-standards-for-public-safety-telecommunicators/file.html

The agency should:
- have established and documented procedures or guidelines for the processing and management of calls for service,
- review procedures annually and update as deemed necessary,
- provide telecommunicators training on procedures and set telecommunicator performance standards for the processing of calls for service,
- have an established performance review process by which job performance is reviewed and evaluated at least annually,
- have the telecommunicator engage in performance reviews. This may include peer-to-peer feedback, self-evaluations, joint goal setting or other methods,
- provide the telecommunicator with their performance review(s),
- ensure a recognition or reward, of an undeviating nature, for outstanding performance,
- ensure a remediation or disciplinary process, of an undeviating nature, associated with substandard performance,
- provide a process during the performance review, where the telecommunicator can distinguish goals and objectives,

Chapter 3 Duties and Responsibilities of the Telecommunicator

With tools and training provided by the agency, the telecommunicator shall be prepared and ready to process any request for service received. If the incident is in the agency's jurisdiction, the nature of the request will be determined. If the incident is of a high priority nature, as deemed by agency protocols, the telecommunicator will dispatch appropriate personnel, notify responders of initial information upon dispatch, ensure the first responders understood the information, and lastly, gather and relay post-dispatch information.

3.1 Alert of Call for Service

There are many ways a telecommunicator may be alerted to a call for service. Callers may make contact utilizing the 9-1-1 system, citizens may call for an emergent response on an administrative line or a unit may request assistance over the locality's radio system.

No matter how a call for service is received, the telecommunicator shall generate an incident entry in the computer aided dispatch (CAD) system. That entry should also include the exact location of the incident as an address verified by the caller, a verified call back number and the reporting party's name. If the caller is unable to provide or verify the address or location the telecommunicator will utilize the mapping system to obtain location information. If the call requires a transfer to another PSAP or agency the transfer should be done without delay and pertinent information relayed. Finally, the telecommunicator shall establish what response the call for service is requiring; resulting in a nature code entry (call type). The nature code (call type) has an agency determined priority in CAD. Once a call for service has been entered, the CAD should notify telecommunicators with an audible alert.

If the agency does not have a call taker position, the telecommunicator, who receives and processes the call, will dispatch the call while on the phone with the complainant. In other circumstances the telecommunicator is a call taker only, and the call will be sent to dispatch after the nature code (call type) and brief description has been entered; with the understanding that incoming pertinent information be relayed to responding units.

3.2 Review of Incident Information

The telecommunicator responsible for dispatching the call for service shall review for accuracy and compliance with agency protocol, the information (Law Enforcement, Fire or EMS etc.), that was entered into CAD. Review of this information will include verifying the address' validity, ensuring the phone number, name of the reporting party, along with a brief description are entered in the CAD notes. The description of events shall appropriately match the nature code (call type) per agencies parameters. The call narrative should include Who, What, When, Where, and Why, and any public or responder safety information regarding the incident.

3.3 Prioritizing Incidents

Once the telecommunicator gathers initial information regarding the type of incident (call type), and enters that information into the CAD, the system should prioritize incidents based on the agency's predefined parameters that have been programmed into the CAD. This automated prioritization aides the telecommunicator in proceeding with the appropriate next steps, following the agencies protocol. Establishing the call type and entering the information into CAD, will aid the telecommunicator in determining the primary unit to be dispatched. Once on scene, the primary responding unit(s) may provide additional information. This information will be entered into the CAD, and may include a change in priority or call type.

3.4 Dispatching of Units

This section addresses the dispatching of emergency response units after an incident is received and initially entered into the CAD

3.4.1 Emergency Response Incident

If the incident is prioritized for an emergency response, the telecommunicator shall dispatch the incident, assigning appropriate units following agency policies. The telecommunicator shall provide initial information to first responders. This information should include, call location, cross streets if available, public safety concerns (traffic hazards, weapons, etc.), suspect description and direction of travel when applicable. To ensure the responding units receive the information, the unit should acknowledge the information via radio response or other means as specified by your agency. Other means may include mobile data terminals (MDT), agency approved chat messaging or telephones etc. Whichever method is approved by your department, an affirmation that the information was received by the field units needs to occur. The telecommunicator shall then gather and relay post-dispatch information, to include updates from the caller if they are still on the line, or report any additional callers and relay new information obtained.

If the incident is not prioritized for an emergency response, the telecommunicator shall dispatch appropriate units or notify units of incident pending; if no dispatch is required,

provide information or assistance as needed. Finally, within the CAD, the telecommunicator will complete the exit process by ensuring all information is properly logged in the incident and closing the incident with the appropriate disposition.

3.4.2 Assigning Responding Units

The telecommunicator shall dispatch available unit(s) based on the location of the incident and availability of units in the district or zone assigned. If that unit is unavailable, then the next available unit will be dispatched. If there is no available unit, the telecommunicator will notify the supervisor in charge, following agency protocols and advise them of all pending calls.

3.4.3 Mutual Aid

Mutual aid is an agreement between agencies and/or jurisdictions in which they agree to assist one another upon request, by furnishing personnel and equipment. Policies should be in place regarding how these agreements are established. The PSAP should have all mutual aid agreements and/or applicable memorandums of understanding (MOU's) within and outside of the local jurisdiction in place, and provide policies and procedures for requesting mutual aid during an incident response. Mutual aid may be requested for significant events such as fires, pursuits, or medical emergencies that are close to jurisdictional borders, and any other emergency situation based on agency policy.

3.4.4 Redirecting Responders

The telecommunicator should dispatch high priority emergencies via radio to make all units aware of the need for an immediate response. Upon notification of pending calls, units will redirect to higher priority incidents based on agency policy and they will notify the telecommunicator of any redirection.

3.5 Incident Communications

3.5.1 Additional Units

There will be situations when additional resources are needed. The agency should establish a resource protocol detailing what resources are available and what resource(s) may be needed based on the type of incident. Telecommunicators must be trained on this protocol.

Additional resources may include:

a. Back up units
b. Other disciplines (local, state or federal)
  i. Fire
  ii. Medical/EMS
  iii. Law enforcement
c. Utility / Public works (e.g. power, gas, electric, highway, water/sewer, etc.)
d. Specialty (e.g. bomb squads, Haz-Mat units, Search & Rescue, air support, animal services, etc.)

Should the incident require additional resources, the telecommunicator should ascertain what resources are required, advise said resources of the need, update the incident along with

relaying post-dispatch information and updates to the field units and agencies as received. The telecommunicator shall document responder activity, provide resources requested from units on-scene, document incident termination, record disposition, complete the incident documentation and exit process.

3.5.2 Establishing Incident Command/Alternate Radio Channel

Incidents often require multi-jurisdictional response. The first arriving unit will give a description of the situation and establish incident command following the incident command system (ICS) standard[3] and agency guidelines, the telecommunicator will repeat the information provided back and ensure all involved units copy the information. All requests and scene updates between units on scene and the telecommunicator shall filter through incident command.

An agency may use additional communications channels when an incident is long term, involves multiple units or multiple user agencies (i.e. law enforcement and fire working the same motor vehicle accident). If the incident involves multiple jurisdictions, the telecommunicator shall follow agency guidelines regarding the use of interoperability channels such as SIRS, National or State Interoperability channels, COMLINC/RIOS.

3.5.3 Emergency Assistance Request

Upon a unit requesting assistance whether it be a request for a backing unit, a declaration of mayday or emergency assistance from another agency (i.e. EMS providers on scene request law enforcement for a combative subject), the telecommunicator shall attempt to obtain location, type of problem, and number of units needed.

As soon as the request is received, the telecommunicator shall broadcast the unit location providing clear and concise information about the incident. When the location is unknown, the telecommunicator shall attempt to obtain the location from the unit. When a unit is unable to provide their location, the telecommunicator shall use responder location technology or their last known location. The telecommunicator shall dispatch and update responding units as information is provided. Supervisors of all affected agencies should be made aware.

Radio priority should be given to the unit by following agency policies such as marking the radio busy or holding the air.

3.5.4 Evacuation

Upon Incident Command determining all personnel should evacuate from a hazardous area, the telecommunicator shall broadcast an agency defined and unique alert tone and make an announcement regarding the evacuation on the main dispatch channel and assigned channels to the incident.

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[3] Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Incident Command System; June 11, 2018; https://www.fema.gov/national-incident-management-system

3.5.5 Placing Units in Service/Cancelling Units

Should the incident move forward and units remain on scene, the telecommunicator shall gather and relay post-dispatch information and updates to the field units and agencies involved as received. If it becomes necessary to cancel units that are enroute to a scene, communication from the telecommunicator to the unit should be made. The cancelled unit should provide an affirmative response and is now available for other calls.

If the incident moves forward and units do not remain on scene, the Telecommunicator shall document responder availability, document incident termination, record disposition, complete the incident documentation and end process.

3.6 Tracking Units

3.6.1 Incident related

As the incident progresses, the telecommunicator or unit shall document all incident-related status changes (such as enroute, on location, location change, transporting, etc…) into CAD or other similar database as timely as possible. The telecommunicator shall ensure the database reflects the most current status for reasons of officer or unit safety as well as for the accurate assignment of incoming incidents.

3.6.2 Routine Status Changes

It is the field responder's responsibility to advise the communications center when they are out of service or otherwise unavailable to respond to incidents. It is the telecommunicator' s responsibility to ensure CAD reflects these status changes in a timely manner. Such routine status changes may include, but are not limited to: meal break, court, maintenance, in station, at the office, training.

3.7 Field Initiated Incidents

Some incidents received for handling by a PSCC/PSAP originate from field responders. The agency should develop and maintain protocols to identify the handling of incidents reported by field responders. The telecommunicator shall acknowledge the unit, document the incident, and determine the location and nature of the event. Once the field initiated incident is active all responder safety checks should be completed and the incident should be handled following the other sections of Chapter 3.

3.8 Officer/Responder Safety Checks

The agency should work with partnering agencies (law enforcement, fire, and EMS) to develop timelines for safety checks per status code to ensure accountability for all working officers/responders. (i.e.; vehicle stops – safety check every 10 minutes, sick person – safety check after 30 minutes, etc.)

For all Law Enforcement incidents, a lead unit or incident commander should be contacted on a regular basis to ensure that everything is okay on the scene of the incident due to the potential for incidents of criminal nature to escalate with little or no warning.

For all Fire and EMS incidents, a piece of apparatus or incident commander should be contacted after an established amount of time to ensure that everything is okay on the scene of the incident due to the fact that Fire and EMS incidents typically have more than 1 person per apparatus and that the majority of these incidents of these types are cleared in a set amount of time.

Conclusion

While the process of dispatching emergency response has many similarities, each PSAP in the Commonwealth is responsible for setting their own protocols for execution based on their specific operations, conditions, and requirements. Continuous training, review and optimization of these processes are of critical importance.

Version History

Version	Summary	Date
1.0	Workgroup final draft	4/25/2018
1.1	Final draft following stakeholder input	6/20/2018
1.2	Published document	7/10/2018