

Tactical Dispatch

“...the purpose of the tactical dispatcher is to support specialized teams with accurate, efficient documentation of events during critical incidents.

There continue to be misconceptions of the 9-1-1 emergency number system by the general public. It is often believed (and the media plays a part in exacerbating this problem) that when an individual calls 9-1-1 for help, they are speaking to a member of the specific profession that is needed. For example, if someone calls for a medical emergency, they assume they are talking to a medically trained professional such as a paramedic or EMT. And when people call 9-1-1 to report a fire, they often believe they are talking to a firefighter. Or if they call to report a crime, they believe they are speaking to a law enforcement officer. What the general public doesn't realize is that, in many jurisdictions, they are actually speaking to a civilian who is specially trained to take their calls for service and assign units to help when the caller so desperately seeks assistance. Telecommunicators possess a set of skills and personality traits unique to their profession that aren't always shared by field officers, firefighters or paramedics. Among those skills is an innate ability to multitask—managing multiple incidents and sources of information at the same time, all while listening and accurately repeating complex information in a concise and efficient manner. **Having a skilled tactical dispatcher on duty during heightened incidents is critical because it frees up officers to resume tactical field roles.**

The general daily duties of a telecommunicator include gathering information, prioritizing needs based on the response level required and resources available, then recording and documenting all communications. This, in a nutshell, is what the telecommunicator does. To expand further, the telecommunicator also completes requests from field responders and runs warrant checks, license plates, articles and vehicles through the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) while keeping responders up to date and disseminating information quickly, efficiently and accurately. These tasks are typically performed within a dispatch center, often with other employees working nearby. Depending on the agency's preferences and resources, the tactical dispatcher may work from within the comm center at a console or on scene, typically from a response unit specially designed for radio capabilities. When the tactical dispatcher is based in a specialized response unit, it is imperative the individual chosen for this position is able to work around any problems or unexpected situations, as there will not be assistance available from a nearby co-worker or supervisor.

The tactical dispatcher is subject to call-outs and must be available when they are needed. There is no rhyme or reason as to when incidents occur, but when situations go downhill they often go in a quick sliding fashion. Therefore it is best to have more than one tactical dispatcher in each agency. Depending upon the size of your agency, you may consider one-eighth of your staff, with a minimum of two tactical dispatchers. For the smaller agencies, one-third may be considered to account for sickness or vacations.

Let's face it: the role of the dispatcher has not been around for that long. **AT&T enacted 9-1-1 as the national number to be used in an emergency in 1968.** It wasn't until 1999 that Congress passed the law making it the nation's number to call in an emergency situation. **The term tactical dispatcher is even newer, but an increasing number of telecommunicators have moved to this type of specialized dispatch over the past decade, and the term continues to be defined each day.**

The primary duty of the tactical dispatcher is to protect responders in the field. The size of the tactical dispatching team needed depends on the size of the department. Too large of a specialized group and the need for each individual to call-out may be rare, while too small of a group could lead to burnout. In the event a tactical incident occurs in your jurisdiction, whether it be a manmade disaster, terrorist event or natural disaster, you may want to consider a group large enough to handle that situation. A contingency plan must be considered in the event members are unable to respond due to power outages or road closures. A good rule of thumb is to have enough members on rotation at least once weekly for every four to six weeks. Again, this is dependent upon the jurisdiction and how large of a community your agency services, as well as the number of average call-outs per month. You want to ensure everyone is able to utilize their skills.

Each agency is different from the other, what works for one may not necessarily work for the next.

Exerpts taken from APCO International Public Safety Communications January 2015:

<https://www.apcointl.org/doc/training-certification-1/cde/577-cde-38939-tactical-dispatch/file.html>