

Chapter 1

Roles & Responsibilities

3 hours

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Arkansas Basic Telecommunicator Course

References:

APCO Institute Public Safety Telecommunicator 1, Seventh Edition, 2016

National Emergency Number Association, www.nena.org

Training Aids:

Prezi Presentation
Computer

Coordination/Personnel:

Gary "Bud" Gray, North Little Rock Emergency Services
Steve Harrison, Central EMS
Carla Holcroft, Washington County Sheriff's Office
Shannon McCuin, University of Arkansas Police Department
Nancy VanWinkle, White County 9-1-1
Amy Barnette, White County 9-1-1

Instructional Unit Summary:

Chapter 1 Roles & Responsibilities

Lesson Purpose:

Each Telecommunicator should be able to demonstrate the history of Telecommunicators, the roles and responsibilities of their position as it relates to the responders, citizens, and the community served.

Instructional Objectives:

At the conclusion of this block, the student will be able to:

1. Display an understanding of Roles and Responsibilities, Mission, & Terminology
2. Display an understanding of the History of Public Safety Telecommunicators
3. Display an understanding of Public Safety Teams
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the importance of Ethics, Professionalism, and Values and how it relates to their position
5. Demonstrate the differences of Policies and Procedures
6. Summarize the Duties and Responsibilities of a Telecommunicator
7. Demonstrate knowledge of the Communities Served and Geographical Service Areas
8. Recognize the importance of Responder Safety

I. INTRODUCTION

Each year more than 240 million 9-1-1 calls are made in the United States and these calls come into thousands of Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) where dedicated Telecommunicators process these calls, analyze them, prioritize them, and refer them to the correct responding units.

Telecommunicators are the competent, unseen voices that provide hope to the hopeless, strength to the weak, and calm to the chaos. Public Safety Telecommunicator is a term used to describe the professionals who perform call-taking duties, dispatching duties or both. Most Telecommunicators do these duties and much more.

Throughout this manual, you will see many acronyms and/or terminologies used. There is a glossary at the end of this manual to assist you in identifying each. If at any time during this training, you do not understand or do not know what an acronym or terminology is/means – ask.

II. BODY

A. History of Telecommunications

1. Before the invention of telephones, there were a number of different systems utilized by the public to communicate emergencies.
 - a. A citizen in the community was designated the “town crier”. His responsibility was to make rounds and notify the community by sounding out an alarm in the event of an unusual incident such as a fire or crime.
 - b. “Watchmen” replaced the town crier and retained the responsibility of warning citizens in the event of an emergency.

- c. The first “electronic reporting devices” consisted of telegraph boxes located within a community. Activation of these alarms summoned firefighters.
- d. Telephone call boxes replaced the telegraph boxes and remained in use until telephones in homes became prevalent. Callers notified Emergency services by calling the applicable responders via a seven or 10-digit phone number.
- e. In the late nineteenth century, all telephone calls were operator-assisted. To place a call, the caller was required to pick up the telephone receiver and waited for the operator to answer. Until dial service came into use, no one could place calls without operator assistance. The adoption of 9-1-1 allowed citizens a direct link to emergency responders, thereby eliminating the need to be connected by the telephone company operator.

2. Act 640 of 2011:

- a. Act 640 allocated funding from 9-1-1 monies collected from cellular telephone bills used to train Public Safety Telecommunicators.
- b. Act 640 specified that the training may include call taking, customer service, stress management, mapping, and use of telecommunication devices for people who have disabilities, etc.
- c. The Arkansas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Training was tasked by Act 640 to establish standards and to provide training.

3. Act 919 of 2015:
 - a. Act 919 of 2015 became Arkansas Code Annotated 12-10-325, which states a Public Safety Agency, Public Safety Answering Point, Dispatch Center, or 9-1-1 Public Safety Communications Center personnel may receive training through the Arkansas Law Enforcement Training Academy or other basic telecommunications certification courses approved by the Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Training.
 - b. Arkansas Code Annotated 12-10-318:
 1. Beginning January 1, 2017, the Emergency Telephone Services Board (ETSB) shall withhold quarterly disbursement from a Public Safety Answering Point or a secondary Public Safety Answering Point until fifty percent (50%) of the Telecommunicators for the city or county have completed Telecommunicator training and Telecommunicator continuing education approved by the Arkansas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Training.

B. Public Safety Teams

1. When an emergency event unfolds will you be ready to take the appropriate actions? Whatever the emergency: fire, severe weather conditions, hazardous material, etc., are realistic scenarios, which can occur in your community at any given time. Simple and decisive actions taken in response to an evolving emergency can mean the difference between life and serious injury/death. Has your team properly prepared for every emergency?

2. Who is your team? Anyone called on to carry out a service during an emergency. This may not just be a first responder - but may include the utility companies, wrecker services, support groups or a variety of private services. We have many resources that help us do our jobs. Without the team working together, resolution may not be easily accomplished.

Practically speaking, this means you must work efficiently and respectfully with other people who have very different responsibilities, backgrounds, objectives, and areas of expertise. It's true that individual initiative is important, but as a professional much of the really important work you do will be done as a member of a group. Your long-term stability and success require you learn the art of cooperation, team-based decision-making, and team communication.

3. Working as a team means to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from any and all emergencies that could affect your communities such as:
 - a. having a comprehensive plan to prevent situations or emergencies
 - b. preparing personnel on the procedures to follow should a crisis occur
 - c. having a well collaborated response approach from all emergency responders including city, county, state, and federal agencies to effectively mitigate any crisis, and
 - d. being ready and able to recover quickly from emergency events to keep your community moving forward.

C. Ethics, Professionalism, Values, Personal Conduct, and Image

1. *Ethics* is simply “Doing the right thing, the right way, even when no one is looking.” Public service professionals require ethics of an individual meet or exceed the standards and expectations of the community and industry served.

Ethics defined: The principals of honor, morality, and accepted rules of conduct that govern an individual or group. A high standard of ethical and moral conduct is an essential ingredient in the development of a Public Safety Telecommunicator on and off duty. Traits, which are associated with a successful agency and Telecommunicators are:

- a. Professionalism: Behavior and attitude patterns, which exhibit standards and character marked by pride in oneself and one's career, respect for the people served, and the development of skills in the pursuit of excellence. *Professionalism* is a vague concept that encompasses honesty, integrity, accountability, and desire to learn new techniques to perfect job skills.
- b. Never Expecting Gratuity: Anything of value intended to benefit the receiver more than the giver to a person because of position and/or authority.
- c. Never become involved in unethical conduct the public may view as a negative reflection of the agency and the entire profession. Acts considered unethical but not criminal could be dishonesty, malicious defamation, prejudice, offering or accepting gratuities, giving false or slanted testimony, discourteousness, and willful neglect of duty, discrimination, and sexual harassment.

- d. **Avoiding Criminal Acts:** Violations of criminal laws and regulations, such as perjury, bribery, theft, identity theft, falsely reporting to law enforcement, falsifying official statement, vandalism, burglary, or firearms violations, etc.
- e. **Avoiding Personal Gain:** Use of official positions to secure privileges or advantages for oneself. Doing personal business with one's agency, is typically, frowned upon because of conflicts of interest. Most Public Safety agencies have rules that prohibit employees from conducting personal business for profit with their agencies.
- f. **Avoiding Negligence:** Failure to do that which a Public Safety Telecommunicator has a direct or moral obligation to do; careless or reckless performance of one's duties.
- g. **Duty to Act:** The duty of a Telecommunicator to take action that prevents harm to the public or another party. Agency policy, procedures or moral standards could influence a duty to act.
- h. **Agency Values:** Telecommunicators must always uphold and follow the values and mission of their agency.
- i. **Confidentiality:** Telecommunicators should maintain the integrity of private information; they should neither seek personal data beyond that needed to perform their professional responsibilities, nor reveal case information to anyone not having proper professional use for such. Violations of confidentiality are subject to disciplinary actions and/or civil liability, and/or criminal prosecution. Public Safety Telecommunicators should refer to their local,

county, or state standards of conduct for employees.

3. A Telecommunicator shall be mindful of the public's expectations of them as a public safety professional. Carelessness of *values or personal conduct* in community activities, expressing disrespect of their profession, the law, or attempt to gain special privilege, will bring disrespect to them and their agency.
4. How does the public view your *image* via social media?

Social media is defined as an internet based technology that allows an individual to share content, information, opinions, media, and experiences with others online. Examples include (but not limited to):

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Snapchat

Since Telecommunicators work in the digital age, social media is available using multiple devices. Posts may be perceived negatively upon an agency.

Telecommunicator Code of Ethics

As a Public Safety Telecommunicator, I will regard myself as a member of an important and honorable profession.

I will keep myself in the best possible physical condition at all times.

I will perform my duty with efficiency at all times.

I will be exemplary in my conduct, edifying in my conversation, honest in my dealings and obedient to the laws of the city, state, and country.

I will not, in the performance of my duty, work for personal advantage or profit.

I will, at all times, recognize that I am a public servant with a duty to serve.

I will be courteous in my contacts at all times.

I will regard my fellow Telecommunicators with the same standards as I maintain myself.

I will be loyal to my fellow Telecommunicators, my superiors and my organization.

I will accept responsibility for my actions.

I will do only those things that will reflect honor on my fellow Telecommunicators, my organization and me.

D. Policies, Procedures, Rules, and Regulations

1. A policy is a guide to thinking. Policies provide a set of guiding principles to help with decision-making.
 - a. Example: Be courteous to fellow Telecommunicators, responders, and the public.
2. A procedure is a guide to action. These describe how each policy should be put into action within your organization.
 - a. Example: Telecommunicators will be prompt, polite, use appropriate language and listen attentively while working with fellow Telecommunicators, responders, and the public.
3. Policies and procedures are important, as they establish the standard of care Telecommunicators are expected to perform.

4. As a Telecommunicator, you are responsible for knowing and following your agency's policies and/or procedures.
5. If you are Emergency Medical Dispatch trained, you are required to follow certain rules and regulations based on those certifications.
6. If your agency is an accredited agency, there may also be certain rules and regulations you are required to follow to maintain the agency's accreditation status.

E. Duties & Responsibilities

1. Some of the duties of a Telecommunicator include:
 - a. Receiving telephone calls
 - b. Prioritizing telephone calls and dispatching appropriate services
 - c. Using various forms of technology
 - d. Ability to multitask
 - e. Obtaining and relaying accurate information
 - f. Working in fast paced and stressful environment
 - g. Properly handling telephone calls
 - h. Remaining calm, courteous and professional
 - i. Working long hours, weekends, holidays, and various shifts
2. As mentioned before, the roles of a Telecommunicator are many. They are the first line of communication

between the citizens and their ability to receive emergency services. Time lost or messages confused on the receiving end could make the difference between life and death. The job entails multiple functions, more in some agencies than others. Here are a few roles that are standard in all agencies.

- a. Receiving Reports: Telecommunicators receive reports of problems by a variety of methods such as alarm systems, radios, telephones, computers, or by walk-ins. However received, the Telecommunicator's job is to get the most pertinent information in the least amount of time.
- b. Dispatching Resources: once the Telecommunicators receive the information, he/she then determines what resources are required, if they are available and which units are closest to the incident. As the situation progresses, the Telecommunicator determines if, any additional resources are required.
- c. Other responsibilities: Telecommunicators also receive ACIC requests, administrative duties, handle non-emergency calls or public information inquiries. They may also be responsible for giving additional services such as Emergency Medical Dispatching and handling misdirected calls or call referrals to other agencies.
- d. Telecommunicators must ensure that all requests for emergency services are appropriately handled appropriately as well as addressing the requests in a timely fashion.

F. Communities & Agencies Served

1. Every PSAP has defined service areas for the agencies within its jurisdiction. Some PSAP Centers provide services to multiple agencies and will have procedures in place for incidents that begin in one jurisdiction and move to other areas. Understanding the community entails understanding it in a number of ways. You have to get to know its people -- their culture, their concerns, and relationships -- and to develop your own relationships with them as well.
2. *Physical aspects.* Every community has a physical presence of some sort, even if only one building. It's important to know the community's size, the look and feel of its buildings, it's topography (the lay of the land -- the hills, valleys, rivers, roads, other features you'd find on a map), and each of its neighborhoods.
3. *Infrastructure.* Roads, bridges, transportation (local public transportation, airports, and railroads), electricity, landline and mobile telephone service, broadband service, pipelines and similar "basics" make up the infrastructure of the community.
4. *Responder Service Areas.* Arkansas is made up of large cities, small communities and counties. Agencies responsible for one area may not provide services to another area in the same county. In cases like this, a service agreement is usually reached between the cities and counties to outline what services will be provided by which agency. Whatever and wherever the call, a Telecommunicator has to know what services are available and who is responsible for covering that particular area. Telecommunicators must be familiar with the resources available and should learn the area they dispatch for. A caller may not have the address of their location but could recognize a structure or landmark. This could help the Telecommunicator identify the location.

- a. *Law Enforcement Service Areas.* Most law enforcement agencies operate within certain geographical areas that are separated by city, county and state jurisdiction. Jurisdiction means authority. In other words, within what geographical, or other area do your law enforcement officers have authority to take action? In addition to primary jurisdiction, authority to act can be created or controlled through numerous state and federal laws. Also, authority can be categorized based upon type of incident officers are responding to. Some officers have statutorily, or other, limited authority based upon the type of call. For example, a county may have an agreement with a smaller city within the county to respond to calls if their officer is off duty.

- b. *Fire Department Service Areas.* A fire department also known as a fire service is a public or private organization that provides predominantly emergency firefighting and fire protection services for a specific geographical area. These areas are typically a municipality, county, state, or special district. A fire department may not respond outside the city limits where a community is covered by a volunteer agency. Many of the rural communities in Arkansas have volunteer fire department and may be staffed by career firefighters, volunteer firefighters, or a combination of both. A fire department may also provide fire prevention services, whereby firefighters visit homes and give fire safety advice and fit smoke alarms for members of the public. Fire prevention outreach is an important role for the fire service, as preventing a fire from occurring in the first place can save lives and property. Some fire departments

provide Emergency Medical Services as well via first responders.

- c. *Emergency Medical Service Areas.* Emergency Medical service areas may vary depending on the type of service they can provide. EMS services may be broken down by Advanced Life Support (ALS), Basic Life Support (BLS), privately owned ambulance services, or hospital dispatched services. EMS providers may have boundaries that are not the same as law enforcement or fire departments.
- d. *Mutual Aid.* Mutual aid is anything requested after a unit arrives on scene or during the incident. Mutual aid agreements (verbal or written) began because it is not economically feasible for any one municipality or county to have all of the staffing and equipment needed to handle every conceivable emergency. Departments regularly assist one another through mutual aid agreements. This means city and county residents are served as needed by more equipment and manpower. The number one goal is helping the individual that is in need.
- e. *Automatic Aid.* Automatic aid is assistance dispatched automatically by contractual agreement between fire districts. For example, two fire districts have an agreement that is predetermined, where both fire districts will respond to the incident at the same time.

G. Assisting Agencies

Where most agencies are limited to their city or county jurisdiction, Arkansas has several agencies that have statewide jurisdiction, even though assigned to a specific district. These are some of those agencies:

Arkansas State Police
Arkansas Game and Fish
Arkansas Highway Police
Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms
Joint Terrorism Task Force
Arkansas Department of Emergency Management
Arkansas State Parks
Drug Enforcement Agency
Arkansas Crime Information Systems
Arkansas National Guard
Union Pacific Railroad Police Department has jurisdiction
on all of their tracks throughout the state.

H. Responder Safety

A Telecommunicator's thoroughness and accuracy directly affect Law Enforcement, Fire and EMS responder safety. Acting as a critical lifeline to first responders, Telecommunicators are the ones who professionally handle dozens of 9-1-1 calls per day. They are committed to providing reliable communication and information as they coordinate and dispatch emergency responses, with the goal to save lives.

Example:

- Obtain/keep accurate information
- Know what units are available
- Know the locations and activities of all units
- Relay information to responders, including any warnings or alerts on a residence or person
- On domestics/high priority calls – querying people through ACIC/NCIC
- Asking about weapons/intoxicants
- Update responders while en route
- Check on responders while they are on scene

III. CONCLUSION

In summation, we have discussed the history, roles, and responsibilities of a Telecommunicator. The passage of ACT 640 of 2012 provided standardized training for Arkansas Telecommunicators. Act 919 of 2015 made training mandatory for Primary PSAPs to receive full funding. As Telecommunicators, we realize the obligation to our responders and communities, as we abide by a code of conduct that builds trust and respect for the profession.