

Ask the Chief.....

What does a Dispatcher do?

When most people think of a dispatcher they picture a person answering a 9-1-1 call, asking a few questions, and sending a police officer, firefighter, or rescue unit to a person in need over a radio. Today's emergency communication's professional is vastly different from the images of old television shows such as Adam12 or Emergency. They handle complex duties that require significant technical and analytical abilities.

Our Central Communications Center, located behind Lakeland Community College, is the center for enhanced 9-1-1 telephone service and Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) for 9 Police Agencies and 8 Fire Departments. As well, these professionals are the centralized answering point for all Wireless 9-1-1 calls made in Lake County. Once a correct location of the caller is obtained the 9-1-1 call is supervised and transferred to the appropriate agency. In 2016 they handled 144,000 calls into the center, and average of 400 per day.

In the performance of their duties dispatchers operate multi-line telephone consoles, alert systems, and TDD systems for the deaf and hearing impaired. It is their job to translate information that comes in via 9-1-1 to the appropriate dispatch codes and get the emergency response units activated. This requires that they ask questions, interpret, analyze and anticipate the caller's situation so as to resolve problems, provide information, dispatch emergency services, and refer callers to other agencies if necessary.

Dispatchers must have knowledge of rules, regulations, and procedures, including safety procedures, such as CPR and first aid. They must have a working knowledge of policies and procedures at the various police and fire services related to emergency communications and disaster and special response plans. Thus they must have knowledge of telecommunications systems, which may include transmission, broadcasting, and switching systems, and computerized databases, including teletype operations and procedures. Further, they must understand jurisdictional boundaries, as well as thoroughfares, landmarks, public buildings and waterways within each jurisdiction to better aid responding units to arrive as quickly as possible to respond to emergencies. This requires the ability to use logic and reasoning to reach conclusions and approaches to problems. They must be able to use judgment and decision-making skills to evaluate situations, establish priorities, and resolve matters. These key abilities including thinking quickly, working well under stressful situations, and actively listening and communicating effectively through clear speech and hearing in the performance of their duties.

Not all of their work is responding to 9-1-1 calls. Our emergency communication's professionals:

- Provide county-wide team support for the Amber Alert Program (locating abducted children & missing adults);

- County support for Silver Alert (locating missing senior adults);
- Central Communications is trained in using the reverse 9-1-1, which is a rapid outbound calling system that notifies homes of important information in any given geographic area of Lake County;
- Central Communications can activate the Emergency Alert System (EAS).
- Central Communications has direct contact with the Perry Nuclear Power Plant in the event of a problem at the Nuclear Power Facility.
- Central Communications Division makes initial notification for the activation of the County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC);
- Serve as a communications center during many large scale events in the County.
- Central Communications provides public education tours to groups throughout the year; such as Lakeland Community College, Boy Scouts of America, Leadership Lake County, Western Reserve Junior Service League, the Auburn Career Center, Girl Scouts, Cuyahoga County Police and Fire Agencies, Mentor Police and Cleveland Police.
- Central Communications also provides emergency contact services for such groups as the Game Warden, Dog Warden, Water Rescue Teams, SWAT Teams, Humane Society, just to name a few.
- Central Communications is the point of contact for AERO Medical Helicopter Services by coordinating radio communications between flight crews and ground emergency service

As Lt. Cynthia Baker explains *"We are not super heroes, but our skills can save lives. You may never see us, but we are always ready to answer your call on possibly the worst day of your life. I am a 911 Police/Fire/Emergency dispatcher. My job is not for everyone, but our passion for this job is what makes us all unique."*

As you can see, dispatching is a complex job, and we cannot say enough about the tremendous professionals in the Central communications Division that serve our citizens!

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