

Consolidated Public Safety Communications

Concept of Operation and Implementation Plan

Current Situation

The City of Santa Monica has historically operated separate fire and police communications centers. Our communications personnel are dedicated professionals who provide an invaluable service to the community and to first responders. They are called upon (literally) to quickly transform confusing and often conflicting data into actionable information and then providing it to first responders. Both centers have suffered from chronic under-staffing, insufficient supervision and oversight, and poor working conditions which include lack of sufficient breaks, reduced training time, and few if any professional development opportunities. Staffing shortages in both communications centers have caused mandatory extensions of shifts up to 18 hours as well as cancellations of days off in order to meet minimum staffing requirements.¹

While fire and police operations are becoming increasingly combined and complementary functions, the separation of their communications centers often delays cross-service communications. This separation of communications centers has led to incidents of reduced situational awareness which impacts first responder safety.²

Objective

To combine fire and police communications into a consolidated communications center in order to provide improved level of service and safety to the community and to first responders through enhanced situational awareness, improved staffing, and improved working conditions.

Concept of Operation

The current fire and police communications centers will be combined into a consolidated communications center under the organizational authority of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). OEM will be divided into two organizational units, the Emergency Management Division and the Emergency Communications Division. Each division will be led by an administrator who will report to the Emergency Services Manager.

¹ Based upon analyses conducted on current and recent conditions in fire and police communications centers: **“City of Santa Monica Consolidated Public Safety Communications Project Review”** by Barry Luke of LDR Government Solutions, LLC February 2014; and **“2008 GeoComm Report on Fire Dispatch”** by Barry Luke and Ken Hobbs of GeoComm Inc. November 2008.

² Example: June 7, 2013 SMFD was dispatched to a residential structure fire, unaware that the SMPD was responding to a related shooting spree that had begun at the same residence with the shooting of two family members and subsequent setting of the residence on fire by the suspect.

Governance

The Emergency Communications Division permanent staff will be comprised of highly skilled civilian communications professionals. Neither sworn police nor fire service personnel will be permanently assigned to work or supervise in the consolidated communications center. An operations agreement will be created between OEM, Police and Fire Departments granting OEM the authority to provide communications to both the Police and Fire Departments. An executive committee will be created to provide oversight on issues of communications policy. The executive committee will consist of the Fire Chief, the Police Chief, the Human Resources Director, the Assistant City Manager, and the Emergency Services Manager. The Emergency Services Manager will work in partnership with the Police Chief on issues related to CLETS (California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System) data and DOJ (Department of Justice) certification including background and discipline review of any CLETS related violations. The Emergency Services Manager will work in cooperation with the Fire Chief and the EMS CQI committee on issues related to EMD (Emergency Medical Dispatch) protocols and Quality Improvement (QI) Review. The Emergency Services Manager will work in cooperation with the Chief Information Officer, the Fire Chief, and the Police Chief on issues related to the integration and implementation of technology in the consolidated communications center.

Organization

The Emergency Communications Division will be led by a civilian Administrator. The Administrator will lead a five person supervisory team. One of the supervisory team will be assigned to a rotational assignment responsible for Quality Assurance and Professional Training. The other four supervisors will each be assigned to a shift which will consist of six positions. Each shift³ will consist of two combined call takers (911), a primary and secondary police dispatcher, and a primary and secondary fire dispatcher. Neither the primary fire position nor the primary police dispatcher position will have any other function except to monitor and assist the first responders on their respective channels. Secondary dispatchers will provide support to the primary dispatchers as needed as well as providing support to the combined call taking positions during periods of high call volume. A “push” or similar coverage system will be established which will allow all members of each shift to take their assigned breaks and meal periods.

The Emergency Communications Division’s permanent staff will consist of civilian personnel in order to provide an opportunity for professional development from Communications Operator, to Public Safety Dispatcher, to Supervisor, to Administrator. Sworn fire or police personnel may be temporarily assigned to the center in short durations in order to obtain familiarity with communications or to accommodate a short term work restriction. Sworn fire and police personnel will be subject to the supervision of the consolidated communications center.

³ Refer to attached staffing diagram

Technology & Working Environment

The Consolidated Communications Center will be located in the current police dispatch center located on the 2nd floor of the Public Safety Facility. The existing ten workstations are in the process of being reconfigured to support processing Fire calls for service and dispatching, in addition to the existing capacity to process Police calls. The existing Fire Station Alerting system is being expanded to support the additional workstations available in the new center. Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD) software is being evaluated to replace the legacy manual system presently used by the Fire Department. The selection of EMD software will be conducted in collaboration with the EMS CQI committee. The telephone and radio systems, which are already designed for co-location, are being updated to support the new consolidated design. The existing consoles have been reconfigured to ensure proper ergonomics Working with Risk Management, specialized chairs designed for 24-hour, use have been purchased, to replace the existing office-style chairs.

Implementation

Both Fire and Police Dispatch Centers are experiencing critical staffing shortages that must be addressed immediately. The following steps are intended as a stop gap measure to address these critical needs:

Fire Dispatch Center:

- Complete lateral hiring process that may allow for immediate transition of As Needed Comm. Op. T. George to a permanent full time Communications Operator.
- Facilitate Comm. Op. L. Castro re-training schedule in anticipation of her Nov. 2014 return from maternity leave.
- Invite Comm. Op. V. Krajcir to transition from permanent part time to permanent full time status.
- Select, background, and hire one new Comm. Op for immediate training.

Police Dispatch Center

- One new Comm. Op. in training
- Maintain 3 existing "960"⁴ retirees and civilian communications cadre⁵ to augment staffing
- Increase number of civilian communications cadre to augment staffing
- Allow sworn police officers with sufficient training to staff vacancies on an overtime basis during critical staffing shortages. This practice will be discontinued as soon as possible but is dependent upon the time needed to hire additional staffing and complete necessary training.⁶

Both fire and police dispatch centers are experiencing critical supervisor shortages that must be addressed immediately. The following steps are intended as a stop gap measure to address these critical needs:

Supervisory Needs

- Complete job spec for Supervisor position and hold internal and external recruitment.
 - Preference will be given to internal candidates who demonstrate critical institutional knowledge.
- Hire two Supervisors immediately, one for fire dispatch and one for police dispatch.
 - Replace existing sergeant position in police dispatch with newly selected Supervisor

⁴ "960" refers to the as needed employees who are able to work a maximum of 960 hours per year.

⁵ Civilian Communications Cadre are employees of other classifications who have prior dispatch training

⁶ Officers must meet same radio and phone proficiency standards as full time communications operators.

The Consolidated Communications Center will require an Administrator who is well versed in both fire and police dispatch disciplines and who is able to work in collaboration with the Fire and Police Departments to create a service model that enhances community and first responder safety.

Administrator

- Candidate interviews and selection completed.
- Conditional job offer accepted by top candidate.
- Complete background, psychological, medical exam requirements.
- Benchmark: Start Date Early December, 2014

Phase 1: Co-Location & Full transition of Communications Operations to OEM

Phase 1 of the consolidation process will bring Fire and Police Dispatch Operations into the same workspace under the management and supervision of the civilian manager and the two civilian supervisors. Staffing will be augmented through the use of existing as-needed personnel. Sworn personnel will only be used in an overtime capacity to cover critical staffing shortages when needed. There will be no sworn supervisors.

OEM will assume operational and administrative responsibility for emergency communications. The OEM Emergency Service Manager and Communications Administrator will work collaboratively with the executive committee, the EMS CQI committee, the 1109 Firefighter Local, and the SMPOA to ensure the smooth transition of dispatch operations.

The first phase of consolidation will require a core of trained combined call takers that can handle 911 calls for Fire, EMD, and Police services.

Combined Call Takers

- New hire list of Comm. Ops. is approved.
- Lateral Comm. Op. Recruitment in progress.
- Benchmark: 6 call takers complete background, psychological, medical exam requirements. Anticipated Training to begin January, 2015
- Combined Call Taker Training will take approximately 4 – 6 months.

Benchmark: Achieve Combined Call Taking, Goal: **June, 2015**

Supervisors

- The Communications Administrator and Emergency Service Manager will select three additional supervisors.

Benchmark: Complete Supervisory Team, Goal: **June, 2015**

Phase 2: Cross Training

The second phase of consolidation we will have a core group of combined call takers who will be able to answer Fire, Police and EMD requests for service. Our supervisory team will be fully staffed. Existing personnel will have the option of remaining in their specialty as Communications Training Officers (CTOs). Existing staff will have the option to participate in cross training in order to become Public Safety Dispatchers. New staff will be required to participate in training to become Public Safety Dispatchers. Estimated to cross train personnel is 4 months to learn the Fire/EMD dispatching skill set and 9 months to learn the Police dispatching skill set. This time estimate may be shortened or lengthened based on each individual employees prior experience and ability to master the new skill set. Existing employees will be provided as much time as necessary for them to master the new skill set. **There is no deadline or requirement for them to become Public Safety Dispatchers.**

Cross Training

- Cross training will occur in stages. Please refer to the attached training schedule for additional information regarding the proposed schedule of personnel to be trained and the training curriculum.

Benchmark: Complete 1st Stage of Cross Training, Goal: **October, 2015**⁷

Benchmark: Complete 2nd Stage of Cross Training, Goal: **June, 2016**⁸

Benchmark: Complete 3rd Stage of Cross Training, Goal: **October, 2016**⁹

Benchmark: Complete 4th Stage of Cross Training, Goal: **April, 2017**¹⁰

Phase 3: Public Safety Dispatch – Consolidation Completed

The third phase of consolidation will have a solid core of combined call takers trained as public safety dispatchers and approximately half of the existing staff will have completed the transition to public safety dispatcher. Phase 3 will concentrate on the following priorities:

- Professional development of staff in specialties, trainer certification and supervisory skills.
- Ongoing Recruitment of Public Safety Dispatchers to ensure full staffing.
- Reevaluate training and staffing goals

⁷ 1st Stage – Fire Skills Training for Existing Police Communications Operators

⁸ 2nd Stage – Police Skills Training for Existing Fire Communications Operators

⁹ 3rd Stage – Fire Skills Training for Existing Police Communications Operators

¹⁰ 4th Stage – Police Skills Training for Existing Fire Communications Operators and/or Combined Call Takers

Preparing for the Future

The consolidation of communications centers is essential in addressing the changing nature of public safety in today's complex environment. Almost all significant public safety events require cooperation and coordination between the different branches of first responders. Data volume will continue to increase in quantity and form with the oncoming implementation of Next Generation 911 which will allow the public to transmit audio, video, and still images as they report emergency events. The combining of fire and police communications centers into a consolidated public communications center will improve situational awareness, remove needless time lags due to call transferring, create cross staffing capacity, and is an acknowledgement of the critical role of communications operators in the delivery of public safety.

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Shift Staffing Model – Co-Location

Combined Call Taking

