Tactical dispatching was created in the early 1990s and, since then, has proven valuable by helping to resolve high-risk situations often associated with special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams. Among the types of incidents tactical dispatchers respond to are barricaded or suicidal suspects, hostage situations, warrant sweeps, high profile public events, suspect area searches, active shooter incidents, officer-involved shootings and dignitary protection details.

When activated to assist SWAT, tactical dispatch teams are organized and equipped for deployment to the command post at the scene of an incident. They can also function at the command post within the department headquarters depending on the type of incident.
The primary mission of tactical dispatchers, when activated as part of a critical incident command team, is to support the tactical command staff by providing accurate and timely documentation of operational information during the course of the event. Tactical dispatchers collect, process and post tactical and operational information related to both suspect-initiated and department-initiated incidents, similar to what they do in their centers every day. Except, this time, all information is displayed in the command post in a structured visual format so that it can be analyzed and reviewed by command staff to assist them in making critical decisions related to the incident.

Jamie Zeller was part of a tactical dispatch team in the San Francisco Bay Area for 12 years and said that her team provided most of the background information on the suspects involved in the various incidents. “We answered the who, what, when, where, why and how. We were there to leave no questions unanswered.” Whether the incident was planned or not, Zeller and her tactical dispatch team checked criminal histories, prior arrests and contacts, and vehicle and driver
Tactical Dispatcher Training Program is designed to train tactical dispatchers in their role within the command post. This program is core to an agency's formal operations, teaching tactical dispatchers to handle critical incidents effectively. Attendees of the California SWAT Tactical Dispatcher Training Program are also taught to employ a highly developed processing system used to create a “visual picture” of the circumstances and events of each incident as they occur. This system is supported by the information collection technology capabilities of each respective agency within the command post, which, if available, can be directly accessed at the scene. Operational information is accumulated into two distinct groupings of related information by time of occurrence using specially designed information processing forms developed specifically for tactical dispatch team operations. These two critical groupings of operational information consist of documenting the suspect actions/behavior with a parallel grouping of department actions/deployment in response to the suspect behavior on a timeline tracking the entire incident.

The visual picture of the operational information developed by the SWAT tactical dispatcher team is documented using special pre-printed forms for displaying the following sequence of events and circumstances based on the time of occurrence:

1. **Suspect Actions/Behavior**
   a. Code violations
   b. Incident circumstances created by suspect
   c. Reporting party information
   d. Description/background history/record checks
   e. Incident location and immediate surrounding area description/configuration

2. **Department actions/deployment**
   a. Deployment positions of all on scene patrol officers, tactical teams, armored vehicles, robots, scouting teams, arrest/reaction teams, command post location, staging areas, evacuated and sheltered in place residences and business, inner and outer containment positions, throw phone insertion point, etc.

Topics include:
- Tactical Operation Procedures
- Command Post Operations
- Duties and Responsibilities of Command Staff
- Duties and Responsibilities of the Tactical Dispatch Team
- Information Processing
- Posting and Mapping
- Command Post Information Display Procedures
- Tactical Communication Systems
- Use of Contemporary Information Processing Technology
- SWAT, Sniper, Negotiation, Patrol, Investigations and Special Unit deployment procedures

Training is focused upon the role, duties and responsibilities of the public safety tactical dispatcher team operating in the department’s field command post or the communications dispatch center. An extensive mock model city, videotapes and multiple command post operational problems are used to simulate actual events and tactical communication circumstances.

According to Zeller, some agencies include their tactical dispatchers in their training exercises on a routine basis to help keep the dispatchers current with operational procedures, while others conduct separate in-house tactical dispatch training. Some tactical dispatchers even train alongside police officers at hostage negotiations school to learn how to assist in this area as well. “In most cases, dispatchers are usually the first point of contact, so teaching them to establish a rapport with subjects is crucial. Extra training like this allows tactical dispatchers to get critical information the negotiation team will need later, plus it buys time for certain measures to be put in place.”

Attendees of the California SWAT Tactical Dispatcher Training Program are also taught to employ a highly developed processing system used to organize and display operational information to create a "visual picture" of the circumstances and events.
b. Sniper team position plots and log  
c. Negotiation team suspect contact information log  
d. Drone information log  
e. Investigation information  
f. Personnel on scene and time of assignment  
g. Master incident action log  
h. Other information logs as designated by command staff  

All operational information documented for the incident by tactical dispatchers is stored for report writing and historical preservation purposes upon conclusion of the event. Post-incident debriefs based upon the actual sequence of response, as documented by the tactical dispatchers provide critical after-action evaluations of operational response capabilities. If any subsequent legal actions are filed against the city, county or law enforcement agency involved in the incident, documentation of the entire incident detailing the suspect actions/behavior can be displayed for trial purposes, along with the related department actions/deployment procedures.

This is further evidence that specialized training should be completed by all tactical dispatchers.

Tactical dispatching requires telecommunications to be super multi-taskers. “If you see a tactical dispatcher on a call-out with one of the tactical teams, take a closer look,” suggested Zeller. “You may just notice they probably have three or more portable radios around them, a sea of maps, poster boards, computers and cell phones. This is a specialized assignment these dispatchers WANT to do. They want to be that point of contact to allow the teams to concentrate on the incident and its evolution. If your agency doesn’t have a tactical dispatching team, you might want to suggest it.” Zeller added that professional associations such as the California Emergency Dispatchers Association (CAL-EDA) assist in the continuous training of dispatchers and their profession, and can be a valuable resource in starting your own team. “And if you have your own team already, make sure it’s included in specialized training right alongside your SWAT team. Training together will allow you to be like a well-oiled machine, one that can work efficiently through the chaos of the incident.”

**Ben Tisa** is a retired FBI agent and has 38 years law enforcement, military and training experience. Ben has extensive experience in providing tactical training to law enforcement and military special operations teams, in addition to expert witness consultation involving incident operations and use of force. He developed the entire California POST Tactical Dispatch Team course curriculum, operational procedures and information processing system.

**Jill Ahearn** is a retired dispatch supervisor for Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety with 23 years of service as police, fire and emergency medical communications dispatcher, including 19 years as a tactical dispatcher/team leader for both a regional SWAT Team and Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety, and she has extensive experience in training both basic and advanced SWAT Tactical Dispatch Team operations.
1. One of the primary missions of the tactical dispatch team is to:
   a. keep the tactical command post informed about other incidents occurring within the jurisdiction
   b. support the tactical command staff with accurate and timely documentation of operational information
   c. ensure SWAT team members have all of their equipment
   d. prepare media releases

2. Depending on the type of incident, the SWAT tactical dispatch team is organized and equipped for deployment ________.
   a. to the command post at the scene of an incident
   b. to the command post within the communications center
   c. to the command post within the department headquarters
   d. both A and C

3. A type of incident the SWAT tactical dispatch team would NOT support is:
   a. active shooter incident
   b. low profile public event
   c. dignitary protection detail
   d. hostage situation

4. Tactical dispatching was created in:
   a. the early 1960s
   b. the early 1970s
   c. the early 1980s
   d. the early 1990s

5. Operational information that should be documented by the SWAT tactical dispatch team are:
   a. suspect actions/deployment and department actions/behavior
   b. suspect actions/behavior and department actions/deployment
   c. suspect behaviors/deployment and department actions/behavior
   d. suspect behaviors/deployment and department behaviors/ deployment

6. All operational information documented for the incident by the SWAT tactical dispatch team is stored for report writing and historical preservation purposes upon conclusion of the event.
   a. True
   b. False

7. Documentation by the SWAT tactical dispatch team assists with post incident debriefs based upon the ________ of responding to the circumstance.
   a. SWAT team members’ written report
   b. best estimated guess
   c. SWAT team members’ recollection
   d. actual sequence

8. SWAT tactical dispatch course curriculum topics DO NOT include:
   a. tactical operation procedures
   b. special unit deployment procedures
   c. negotiation team tactics
   d. duties and responsibilities of the tactical dispatch team

9. Operational information displayed by the tactical dispatcher team as part of the “visual picture” includes:
   a. suspect description/background history/record checks
   b. sniper team position plots and log
   c. personnel on scene and time of assignment
   d. all of the above

10. Which of the following is NOT used in California’s formal SWAT tactical dispatcher training program to simulate actual events and tactical communication circumstances:
    a. mock model city
    b. techniques to physically subdue an active shooter
    c. videotapes
    d. multiple command post operational problems

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