

Fairfax County, Virginia
Department of Public Safety Communications

Fairfax County 9-1-1, always there, always ready...24/7/365



August 26, 2016

Standard Occupational Classification Policy Committee
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
2 Massachusetts Avenue NE., Suite 2135
Washington, DC 20212

Dear Standard Occupational Classification Policy Committee:

Reference: Current SOC Title.....Police, Fire and Ambulance Dispatchers
verses Requested SOC Title.....Public Safety Telecommunicator

Good morning and thank you for your service to our government. Like you, I also work for government at the local level at Fairfax County, Virginia, where I am the Director of the Fairfax County Department of Public Safety Communications (DPSC).....aka *Fairfax County 9-1-1*.

I am privileged to have been in public safety for 62 years, 48 years of which have been in 9-1-1 public safety communications, beginning two months after 9-1-1 was first implemented in the United States on February 16, 1968. During this period I have served in every capacity; call taker, dispatcher, supervisor, manager, trainer, assistant director and director. The latter, in three different jurisdictions of the National Capital Region (NCR), i.e. Arlington County, Montgomery County and during the last 11 years.....Fairfax County.

The purpose of my letter is two-fold. The first is to share with you the deep concern I have about the recent initial decision by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to not change the current Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) of "Police, Fire and Ambulance Dispatchers", presently included in the Office and Administrative Support Occupations (office clerks & secretaries) classification, to the far more accurate and descriptive proposed title of Public Safety Telecommunicator (PST), and include in the "Protective Service" occupations classification, with police officers, firefighters, lifeguards, parking meter enforcement workers, fish and game wardens, TSA screeners, animal control workers, private detectives, casino surveillance officers, ski patrol, playground monitors, etc. as requested by the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO).

Secondly, I would like to share with you dimensions of the duties, roles and responsibilities of a public safety telecommunicator (9-1-1, Law Enforcement, Fire-Rescue and Emergency Medical Service calltaker/dispatcher), as it has evolved to in 2016, a period of almost a half century.

Every minute of every day, three-hundred twenty-five (325) 9-1-1 calls are made, 365 days a year. This equates to 240 million 9-1-1 calls annually. Each of those calls is answered by a 9-1-1 calltaker/dispatcher, located in one of approximately 6,000 9-1-1 centers (Public Safety Answering Points/PSAP) throughout the United States. PSAPs can be small, medium or large in size, serving small, medium or large towns and cities or in many cases counties or multiple counties. Fairfax County 9-1-1 is one of the ten largest PSAPs in the US.

Every 9-1-1 call made, is often for the caller, the most important call they will ever make. For the 9-1-1 calltaker/dispatcher that receives the call, it provides the opportunity to assist the caller in the caller's most important time of need. The 9-1-1 calltaker/dispatcher engagement with the caller is the first and most important step in the 9-1-1 continuum. This is why, since 09-11-01, 9-1-1 calltakers/dispatchers are often referred to as the *First of the First Responders*. Because, before an alert tone is sent to a volunteer firefighter in rural America at 3 AM reporting a house fire, before a state police officer is dispatched to a traffic accident on an Interstate highway, before an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) or Paramedic (EMT-P) is dispatched to a report of a heart attack, before red and blue warning lights are turned on to respond to a report of a baby that has stopped breathing, before sirens are activated on a police or sheriff patrol car responding to a report of a "shots fired", before an ambulance is dispatched to a childbirth case and before fire-rescue units are dispatched to an explosion/fire at a shopping center.....the highly trained 9-1-1 calltaker/dispatcher is reacting, i.e. "*responding*" to those in need, by acquiring and/or giving critical lifesaving information and/or medical/pre-arrival instruction to assist the caller, victim or patient.

Last year (2015) in my own agency 9-1-1 call takers/dispatchers administered CPR instruction on 1,712 occasions, assisted mothers and those with them in the birth of 62 babies (see *) and gave lifesaving instruction during 628 other life threatening events. * Two interesting asides related to assist in child birth events are, that often; the parent will later call DPSC and request an audio recording (all calls received and dispatches made are recorded for legal and quality review purposes) of the birth to keep for posterity and the parent will ask for the name of the 9-1-1 call taker that provided the instruction so as to thank them formally and sometimes even to name the newborn infant after the 9-1-1 calltaker.

The above only begins to detail the role and responsibility of 9-1-1 calltakers/dispatchers in 2016. After the 9-1-1 call is received, triaged and entered by the 9-1-1 calltaker, the dispatcher is then responsible for the actual dispatch of units to an event. The dispatcher in public safety is akin to a Mission Controller at a space flight center or Air Traffic Controller at an airportcoordinating and controlling many public safety units in their response to an emergency event, and then in their coordination with the on-scene Law Enforcement/Fire-Rescue/EMS Incident Commander of the event. 9-1-1 call takers/dispatchers are trained in and are an integral component of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). On major long-term events tactical incident dispatchers are deployed to the scene of the event to staff mobile command posts and assist incident commanders and field personal.

A 9-1-1 calltaker/dispatcher applicant in my agency is hired only after an extensive recruiting and hiring process including testing, interviews, background investigation and medical examination. They attend and must successfully pass a ten (10) week 600 hour academic training academy, followed by a 10 week/600 hour on the job training and application of the skills learned period. The mantra of the DPSC training academy is "*Saving Live, Begins Here*". Those skills include, but are not limited to; operating sophisticated state-of-the-art 9-1-1 telephone, computer aided dispatch, multi-channel radio, geographic mapping and geospatial satellite resource location systems; accessing and entering information in federal, state and local law enforcement data bases; complying with numerous national professional standards; operating under the license of a physician while administering authorized and approved pre-arrival medical instruction for virtually every medical situation reported; plus adherence to copious internal policies, procedures, directives and orders that are reflective of the police and fire-rescue operations that they support. In addition, 9-1-1 calltakers/dispatchers assist in providing language interpretation to non-English speaking callers, and through specialized training, negotiate the diversion of callers threatening suicide and help mitigate hostage situations.

In the near future the Next Generation of 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) will be deployed across the nation. NG9-1-1 will increase tenfold the technology used by 9-1-1 calltakers/dispatchers and dramatically impact the complexity of their duties and responsibilities.

My 9-1-1 calltakers/dispatchers have, on average, sixty (60) seconds, 2,000 times a twenty-four (24) day, to make a positive first impression with the public and many more times to create a safe environment for our partner agency police officers, firefighters, paramedics and sheriff's deputies.

There is a frequently expressed statement in Law Enforcement, Fire-Rescue and EMS. It is.....*You may not be on good terms with your maker, parents, spouse or significant, children or employer, BUT you better be on good terms with your dispatcher, because they can help save your life.*

I could include much more, but what I have provided I hope will serve to further your understanding of what it is like to be a 9-1-1 calltaker/dispatcher in 2016.

Before you render a final decision on this SOC topic, I urge you to please consider the above information. Also, I would like to formally invite you to visit and tour with us at *Fairfax County 9-1-1* to witness firsthand the work of the most incredibly important personnel in public safety communications....9-1-1 calltakers/dispatcher....the *First of the First Responders*.

Thank you for your consideration of the above and I hope you are able to visit/tour. Fairfax County 9-1-1 is located at 4890 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030.

I can be reached at steve.souder@fairfaxcounty.gov and **571-641-7028**.

Respectfully and with appreciation.

Steve Souder

Steve Souder, Director
Fairfax County Department of Public Safety Communications