

HOW TO MAINTAIN ECC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Updated and clearly stated guidance is key to smoothly operating public safety communications.

By Rhonda Braudis

While this is a question for which the answer should be obvious, it is often asked anyway: Why do we need policies and procedures?

Policies and procedures keep everyone in the emergency communications center (ECC) on the same page and away from the liability issues that are ever-present in our industry. Do an online search on any platform for “9-1-1 dispatcher lawsuits.” The result will be a long list of situations where policy and procedure were not followed, adhered to or regarded. Policies and procedures keep us focused.

So why do we need policy and procedure when we have guidecards? Guidecards are tools that provide ready access to EMD, fire and law enforcement dispatch policies to ensure that public safety telecommunicators consistently follow policies and procedures. The two go hand in hand.

Having policy and procedure provides the necessary tools, guidance and direction needed to carry out our daily duties. I have worked for agencies where policy and procedure were present in abundance within the

fire and law enforcement department, but were severely lacking in dispatch. I have also worked for agencies that have policy and procedure documents in abundance but haven’t reviewed them for several years.

Your agency may have methods or protocols for what you do and how you function daily, but does this mean you’re following best practices set forth by national standards? To ensure compliance with national standards, it is essential to have timely and regular updates of policies and procedure, not just once a decade. When was the last time you read all of your policies and procedures? Are you following the guidelines, rules and objectives for your agency? When you were presented with policies, procedures and protocols, did you fully read them or did you sign off on them just to get them done? We have all done this at some point in our careers. Best practices should include signing off only when you have fully read and asked questions about

the policies. You may want to ask who is responsible for updates and changes. When was the last time you reviewed policies and procedures to ensure accuracy? Take it step by step and review each policy and procedure to ensure your actions meet the standard.

The first step is recognizing what policies you already have and what you need, then ensuring they fit your agency. Depending on its size and scope, your agency may want an all-inclusive policy and procedure document or to have several under the same umbrella.

If your center lacks policies and procedures altogether, you are not alone! Starting from scratch can seem overwhelming so don’t reinvent the wheel. Find an agency of similar size and structure and request their policies. This gives you a roadmap and an example to begin creating policies and procedures to fit your agency and structure.

As you begin the review or writing, you may want to consider how your agency is set

up. Are you set up as an agency call taker/telecommunicator (same person), call takers and telecommunicator (different positions) or shared duties (team dispatching)? What works for one may not work for the other, so your policies and procedures must fit the reality of your agency.

When writing or reviewing, look for words such as “will,” “shall” and “always.” These words indicate ministerial acts, leaving no room for discretion. There are no shades of gray or exceptions to the rule — it must be done or completed as stated. If, on the other hand, exceptions may arise and discretion must be exercised, a simple exchange of words such as “attempt,” “effort,” “strive to” or “endeavor” would be called for.

We may look at a policy a dozen times and still miss something based on how we read documents. For example, I am responsible for reviewing the policies and procedures at my agency. I could look at the same document over a dozen times and still miss areas. Frustrating doesn’t even begin to describe continuously finding something else that I missed. What was the fix? I asked myself why I was doing these reviews alone instead of using my telecommunicators to create a review team. I brainstormed some prizes — king-size candy bars, pizza coupons, and even hand-designed coupons for a free dress down day out of uniform — and used them as incentives for those who went through the policies and procedures and found areas that needed updating. We had some fun and, in the end, we updated our policies. Spending your own money isn’t required but find a way that works for you to get the best review from your essential and valued employees. This creates less frustration and more buy in from your team.

What is the alternative to systematically maintaining an updated set of policies and procedures? I have seen agencies push out a new procedure, protocol or directive through



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email or memos without formalized structures. It works for the time being, but what happens when time passes, and the next round of applicants begin training? Memos and emails have a way of falling through the cracks. We remember that we do it that way but are not sure where it came from or, in some cases, what the reasoning was behind it. As you can imagine, this becomes a huge issue in getting everyone on the same page. Over time that email is forgotten, and we

fall into the “well, that’s how I was trained” syndrome or “that’s the way we’ve always done it.”

Without EMD policies and procedures, you would rely solely on training, experience and memory to correctly ask questions, use guidecards and provide resources based on requests. Without policies and procedures, you must consider whether you’re getting vital procedural information out to your 9-1-1 telecommunicators. ●

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CDE EXAM #58171

QUIZ

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| <p>1) Every agency is alike.
a. True
b. False</p> <p>2) We all work in different centers with different logistics and population sizes, with different needs and _____ from responders in the field.
a. Uses
b. Requests
c. Paradoxes
d. Orders</p> <p>3) Each agency has various _____ of policies and available resources.
a. Resources
b. Lessons
c. Levels
d. Lists</p> | <p>4) All are examples of policies or procedures except:
a. SOPs
b. Protocols
c. Emails
d. Directives
e. All the above are examples</p> <p>5) Policies and procedures should be reviewed:
a. Annually
b. Monthly
c. Bi-annually
d. Every decade</p> <p>6) Words such as will, shall or always relate to a _____ act/duty.
a. Discretionary
b. Ministry
c. Ministerial
d. Legalized</p> <p>7) If you do not have any policy and procedures at your agency you have no protocols in place?
a. True
b. False</p> | <p>8) We are in most (not all) areas covered by Serenity Immunity, however this means you are doing your jobs/duties with due diligence.
a. True
b. False</p> <p>9) Policy and procedure keep us focused and in best practices we must look at what would a fair and prudent person do.
a. True
b. False</p> <p>10) We must continue to focus on reducing _____ and ensuring our practice meets our agency’s policy and procedure.
a. Negativity
b. Objectivity
c. Subjectivity
d. Liability</p> |
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