

SYSTEM FAILURE

Are you prepared for a critical systems operating failure in the ECC?

By Suzanne DeFillips

In today's public safety environment, policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) are the foundation for ensuring an agency maintains best practices in operations, core competencies, training, quality assurance, technology and standards. Often these documents become the bible for an emergency communications center (ECC) because they supply the dos and don'ts at all levels of administration and operations and set forth structure and guidance for personnel. They also provide protection from agency and individual liability because they follow the guidance and requirements from the Criminal Justice Information System, National Fire Incident Reporting System, National Incident Based Reporting System, National Emergency Number Association, Department of Homeland Security, National Fire Protection Association, APCO and similar organizations.

Technology failure in the ECC might happen with CAD, radio, 9-1-1 lines, administrative lines or interfaced software affecting internal and external notifications (to agency and vendor support). This in turn could influence workflows such as call handling for emergency medical, fire or police dispatch; alert tones; teletype; and similar resources.

In many agencies these documents represent legacies and may include obsolete processes. Agencies often have unwritten procedures and react to technology failures ad hoc; this can impact how the dispatch team responds when CAD, radio, phone, emergency medical dispatch or other resources are unavailable to complete the incident mission. Typically, an ECC may only update policies during an audit or accreditation process. It's important for ECCs to develop a process and a schedule for reviewing policies and SOPs because of the far-reaching impact they can have on:

- Response times to calls for service
- Deployment of personnel and resources
- Situational awareness and command and control
- Safety for personnel and citizens
- Redundant and repetitive actions
- Operational risks
- Effectiveness of strategies and tactics
- Employee productivity
- Information management capabilities
- Operations management capabilities
- Quality of department work products
- Internal and external customer satisfaction
- Internal and external operational and administrative communication
- Insurance Services Office rating

Policies should be reviewed annually—or sooner if there is a change in management, programs, procedures, systems, equipment, regulations and standards. As an ECC considers new technology or equipment, and Next Generation 9-1-1 pushes the boundaries of what public safety considers mainstream, policies and SOPs should be reviewed. Even when it seems minor, a change can alter personnel needs, shift dynamics, information flow and operations management, requiring a revision

to the current policy or even eliminating a specific policy.

This includes how the center operates when critical systems fail. Prior to COVID-19, the thought of answering 9-1-1 remotely from a telecommunicator's home was considered futuristic and costly. ECCs that implement these capabilities should revamp their call handling procedures and policies for remote 9-1-1. This might include at-home policies surrounding technology and location set up in remote locations, meal breaks, remote supervision, video monitoring, notifications and system failures.

When reviewing their system failure policies and procedures, ECCs should consider the technology and the workflow associated with that technology. For example, if CAD is down, the call taker will be unable to send an incident to dispatch and update comments via standard operating procedures. Time is critical, and most agencies pull out pen and paper or cards to document pertinent call information to manually pass back and forth from call taker to dispatcher. With today's administrative technology, it is now possible to create a live document (outside of CAD) that can be shared and edited in real-time by multiple users, using Office Live through Microsoft Word, Google Docs and similar resources. Agencies should consider the software applications available in their center that can be used in an alternative workflow when all else fails.

Technology failure in the ECC might happen with CAD, radio, 9-1-1 lines, administrative lines or interfaced software affecting internal and external notifications (to agency and vendor support). This in turn could influence workflows such as call handling for emergency medical, fire or police dispatch; alert tones; teletype; and

similar resources. Responses to these system failures may include:

- EMD/fire dispatch/police dispatch software to card sets or tablets
- Patrol units (logged in) and automatic dispatch recommendations to zone or run cards
- 800 MHz radio to BUCS/FAIL SOFT, the backup radio failover system
- Jurisdiction and state options for routing 9-1-1 during system failures
- Administrative lines to cell phones
- CAD maps to 9-1-1 phone maps, Google Maps or map books
- Teletype to RMS persons and warrant check and links to law enforcement DHMV checks

Resources that can be used to improve ECC shift dynamics and communications among telecommunicators in the event of system failures include:

- Pen and paper/cards
- Whiteboard
- Designated runner
- Live document streams (Word, Google Docs and similar resources)
- Intercom system
- Video conferencing (Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, Zoom)

In the aftermath of an incident, centers should determine:

- How the information gets put back into critical systems, such as CAD
- How the ECC tracks system failures and how to implement alternate procedures
- What procedures worked and what needs revision

Agencies—regardless of their size—can set up a schedule for policy and SOP review. Larger agencies with an accreditation or training division may find these divisions can easily manage this task because they work with these documents daily. Other agencies may assign each division within the department a section for review. Creating a structured process with timelines for each policy review will streamline the process and provide accountability for the individual or division responsible for the review.

Finally, revising a policy/SOP is not enough. Agencies must publish the revised or new policy in a platform that ensures they notify all personnel and can track their receipt. Test the new operational concepts and procedures prior to implementation. ECC personnel should

regularly review and practice procedures in response to technology failures, and they should be given the opportunity to make recommendations. Don't forget to archive the old policies and replace them with the new on the agency's policy publication platform. ●

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QUIZ

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| <p>1) Public safety _____ are the foundation for ensuring an agency is maintaining best practices in operations, core competencies, training, quality assurance, technology and standards.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Policies and SOPs Telecommunicators Field responders None of the above <p>2) Why is it important for agencies to develop a process and a schedule for reviewing policies and SOPs?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Improves response times to calls for service Ensures deployment of personnel and resources Develops situational awareness and command and control All of the above <p>3) Policies should be reviewed _____ or sooner if there is a change in management, programs, procedures, systems, equipment, regulations and standards.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Every other year Never Annually As needed | <p>4) Any change, even what may seem minor, can completely alter _____ and operations management, requiring a revision to the current policy or even eliminating the need for a specific policy.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Personnel needs Shift dynamics Information flow All of the above <p>5) When ECCs look at their system failure policies and procedures, agencies should consider what?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The technology and specific workflow associated with that technology Personnel needs for each shift Policies and procedures are not needed for system failures because its unknown what technology will fail. None of the above <p>6) Planning for system failures is not the responsibility of the ECC.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> True False | <p>7) Technology impacted should be considered when creating procedures for system failures.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> True False <p>8) Workflows, shift dynamics and communication should be considered when creating procedures for system failures.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> True False <p>9) Creating _____ will streamline the process and provide accountability for the individual or division responsible for the review.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Policy and procedures A structured process with timelines for each policy review A policy review board None of the above <p>10) Archiving old policies and publishing the new and revised policy and procedures in the agency's designated platform will ensure consistency and continuity of operations.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> True False |
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