

From the Office of the Sheriff: “E911 Center – Your Lifeline”

No division is more important to the greater Dodge County population than the Communications Division. Consisting of 18 professionals and operating from a state-of-the-art E911 Center. Bottom line – If you need help, emergency or non-emergency, you will talk to a 911 Communications Officer (CO) at the Dodge County Sheriff’s Department.

Our first move in 2004 was to construct a 911 Center that would provide the latest technology and room for expansion. For the next several years we worked on establishing partnerships with the local police departments, consolidating four communication centers into just one. This greatly enhanced efficiency, improved response times, and saved local agencies considerable money. In 2008, the Dodge County E911 Center became the sole recipient for 911 calls, hard line or cellular.

Taking phone calls and radio dispatching consumes a CO’s shift. In 2006, the center received 88,000 phone calls of which 15,000 were 911 calls. In 2008, after consolidation these numbers increased to 121,000 calls (332 per day), of which 20,000 (55 per day) were 911 calls. Receiving a 911 call is not an easy task and no amount of training can prepare a CO for many of the calls they receive and the stress involved. A CO could be taking a barking dog complaint one minute and talking an elderly man through CPR the next or providing regular radio traffic to a squad car that quickly develops into a police pursuit. These are very important responsibilities which we rely upon, in a professional, flawless manner. CO’s know the decisions they make, the information they gather from callers is critical and the lack of information can lead to serious injury or death to those who respond. The center can also track any 911 call and has been successful in finding people that were lost, using our technology to plot their exact location. There are also 911 abuses. Case and point, when we activate the tornado sirens, the first 911 call will be from a citizen, wanting to know what’s going on.

The responsibility of a CO is not limited to law enforcement. The E911 Center also receives calls on behalf of all fire, EMS, and first responder services, to include paging, dispatch, and radio communications. It would not be out of the ordinary for two on-duty dispatchers to juggle 15-20 law enforcement units and the same number of fire service and EMS units at one time. Very often we forget that it is easy for one of us (police officer) to call in on the radio, but we must understand that we may be just one of 40 total units who may have important information to communicate. The CO is balancing all 40.

What makes our Communication Officer’s special is they are dedicated to dispatch and await the next emergency call. No filing or word processing, just dispatching, mentally prepared, totally focused, and full of knowledge, aware of the answer to any questions that may arise. We work hard to staff the center with three CO’s at a time, 24/7, but at times we fall short. The team readily responds when additional help is needed, snow storms, tornadoes, major traffic crashes, as they understand how difficult it can be to work while understaffed. I have always said I could do every job within the department, except that of a Communications Officer, they are one-of-a-kind.

On the National War College front, Presidential power, Capitol Hill and Supreme Court visits, the impact of lobbying on the legislative process, and a dose of immigration reform. Coffee filter count stands at 133, thanks for listening, tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us