
Introduction

This report examines 9-1-1 public safety dispatching in Minnesota. Although many calls for assistance come from callers dialing 9-1-1, many others arise from calls on other public safety telephone lines. Public safety telecommunicators handle them all. Throughout the report, when we discuss 9-1-1 dispatching, we include responses to calls coming from both 9-1-1 and other seven-digit telephone lines, and 9-1-1 calls made on wireless telephones, for emergency and nonemergency situations.

In this review, we examined the operations, equipment, and personnel management of Minnesota's public safety answering points (PSAPs), which are authorized to dispatch public safety services.¹ County sheriff offices or law enforcement centers operate most PSAPs, although a few cities operate their own. We also included in our review the communications centers for Minnesota's 10 state patrol districts, which currently receive 9-1-1 calls made with cellular and other wireless telephones.

Each PSAP has developed its own techniques for 9-1-1 dispatching. We looked at the overall management, structure, and results of the PSAPs but did not evaluate the actions of individual public safety dispatchers. We studied, for instance, how many PSAPs offered medical instructions to callers at the scene of medical emergencies and the scope of the

This review defines successful 9-1-1 dispatching and gives examples of public safety answering points that use best practices.

emergency medical services they offered, but did not monitor how individual dispatchers responded to medical calls.

The report describes many of the components necessary for effective and efficient 9-1-1 dispatching, as defined by national public safety organizations. It provides examples of Minnesota PSAPs that are using successful practices. Further, it encourages the adoption of these practices wherever appropriate around the state.

To conduct this review, we collected information in several ways. We began the project by holding a roundtable discussion to better understand the issues associated with 9-1-1 dispatching as viewed by sheriffs and other law enforcement officials, PSAP officials, county commissioners and administrators, and legislators. We reviewed literature published by national and local organizations within the public safety industry. For additional information we interviewed PSAP directors and some providers of emergency services, such as ambulance providers, and spent time observing dispatchers in action. With this information, we were able to define many characteristics of effective and efficient service.

To learn more about specific PSAP operations, equipment, and personnel, we surveyed by mail each

¹ Minn. Stat. §403.02, subd. 5.

Minnesota PSAP. After identifying effective and efficient practices, we visited about a dozen PSAPs—small and large, urban and rural—for a better understanding of their particular methods and techniques.

Throughout the review, we relied on advice and feedback from members of a technical advisory panel. The 20-member panel, consisting of PSAP directors, sheriffs, and other local and state officials, offered its professional assistance and guidance as we conducted the study. We also hired a retired public safety communications officer to provide technical assistance. Appendix A lists the panel members and provides additional details on the methodology of this review.

This report has two chapters. The first chapter provides background information on the arrangement and financing of 9-1-1 public safety dispatching in Minnesota and describes how public safety answering points vary around the state. In this chapter we also discuss several current issues that have the potential to affect 9-1-1 dispatching in the future. Chapter 2 describes goals and actions for effective and efficient 9-1-1 dispatching. It also presents examples of local governments around Minnesota that use best practices in delivering their 9-1-1 service.