

BECOMING AN

EXEMPLARY PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHER

AN INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHER TRAINING



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EXEMPLARY PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHER

**California Commission on
Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST)
and
Michael Josephson
Josephson Institute of Ethics**

This publication is based on the similar suite of materials, Exemplary Peace Officer, which was created under contract with The Josephson Institute of Ethics. It is part of the materials that develop the concept of ethical considerations and effective decision making strategies into basic training communications center operations.

BECOMING AN EXEMPLARY PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHER
An Introduction to Public Safety Dispatcher Training

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POST Mission Statement



**The mission of the California Commission
on Peace Officer Standards and Training
is to continually enhance the professionalism
of California law enforcement in serving
its communities.**



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Foreword

The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) is pleased to provide this publication: *Becoming an Exemplary Public Safety Dispatcher*.

Becoming an Exemplary Public Safety Dispatcher is another tool that educates and equips applicants, academy students and public safety dispatchers with skills to assist them in making insightful decisions that result in longer-term career success.

The Commission greatly acknowledges the efforts and creativity of the development committee. The Commission also extends its appreciation to the members of the Editorial Review Board for their input and active participation in the development of this publication.

You now become the beneficiary of the collective perception and experience of all who have assisted in the production of this publication.



Who Am I?

I am the voice that calms the mother breathing life into her infant son.

I am the invisible hand that holds and comforts the elderly man who woke up and found his wife of 50 years had passed away during the night.

I am the friend who talks the disgruntled teenager out of ending her own life.

I sent help when you had your first automobile accident.

I am the one who tries to obtain the information from callers to ensure that the scene is safe for those I dispatch to emergencies - all the while anticipating the worst and hoping for the best.

I am the psychologist who readily adapts by language and tone of voice to serve the needs of my callers with compassion and understanding.

I am the ears that listen to the needs of all those I serve.

I have heard the screams of faceless people I will never meet nor forget.

I have cried at the atrocities of mankind and rejoiced at the miracle of life.

I was there, though unseen, by my comrades in the field during the most trying emergencies.

I have tried to visualize the scene to coincide with the voices I have heard.

I am usually not privy to the outcome of the call, and so I wonder...

I am the one who works weekends, strange shifts and holidays. Children do not say they want my job when they grow up.

Yet, I am at this vocation by choice.

Those I help do not call back to say thank you.

Still, there is comfort in the challenge, integrity, and the purpose of my employment.

I am thankful to provide such a meaningful service.

I am a mother, a father, sister, brother, son or a daughter.

I am here when you need me and still here when you don't.

My office is never empty, and the work here is never done. I am always on call. The training is strenuous, demanding and endless.

No two days at work are ever the same.

Who Am I?

I am an emergency dispatcher and I am proud.

Author Unknown



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PART 1

The Public Safety Dispatcher – An Overview

State of California 911 Centers

911 Dispatch communication centers are governed, structured and staffed in various configurations around the state. If you are considering a job in the public safety communications field and explore different agencies, you will see they are similar but different. The common threads they share are the basics of what 911 public safety dispatchers do.

State, County, Municipal, and Private Dispatch Centers

The California State Office of Emergency Services oversees the Public Safety Communications 911 Emergency Communications Branch. The goal of the Public Safety Communications 911 Emergency Communications Branch is to enable public safety answering points (PSAPs) in dispatch communications centers to provide expedient telephone access to emergency services for all 911 emergency callers by assisting PSAPs in the administration and funding of this lifesaving resource in their communities. Area's of responsibilities, mandates and statutes can be further explained on their website. (www.caloes.ca.gov)

The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) was established to set minimum selection and training standards for California law enforcement (www.post.ca.gov). The POST program is voluntary and has more than 600 agencies participating, including over 8,000 public safety dispatchers. Those agencies who don't participate may still follow the standards set forth by the State, or may follow other agency or association guidelines for training and selection.

Like associated occupations such as police officer, records clerk, or other public safety vocations, the position of Public Safety Dispatcher (PSD) is a recognized profession in the State's public safety network. With the implementation of 911, the profession has diversified, providing for a variety of configurations of 911 dispatch communication centers. Some examples are:

- Small (less than 25 full-time dispatchers)
- Medium (between 26 and 50 full-time dispatchers)
- Large (51 or more full-time dispatchers)

These centers can cover individual or a combination of urban, suburban and/or rural communities. They can be governed by government agencies or owned by private companies. In the case of ambulance dispatch, some centers are owned and managed by privately owned ambulance companies that contract with cities and counties for medical transport services.

When you apply for a position with an agency, it is important to know who your potential employer could be. Here are some examples of agency governance models and/or structures:

- **Government operated**

Either sworn peace officer or civilian managed, the center's employer is the state (e.g., California Highway Patrol), county (e.g., Riverside County Sheriff's Department), or city (e.g., Los Angeles Police Department).

- **Joint Powers Agreements (JPA)**

Typically, these centers have consolidated operations, meaning they dispatch for a configuration of law, fire, and ambulance in varying degrees, e.g., police and fire only, fire and ambulance only, or multiple law agencies, multiple fire agencies, etc. (e.g., Santa Cruz Regional 911 or Shasta Area Safety Communications Agency (SHASCOM911))

- **Private**

As previously described, some agencies have their own dispatch centers and can provide services to many communities in the State. If these agencies contract with government agencies, as some ambulance agencies do, they would be considered "secondary" centers, and as such, calls for service are transferred from primary agencies (law) to a secondary service provider.

Many of the above organizations can also serve as contractors. Some agencies opt not to operate their own dispatch centers and may contract with any of the above entities for services. For example, a county dispatch center may hold several contracts with smaller cities within their county.

Duties and Responsibilities

Duties and responsibilities vary from agency to agency. Like the previous variations of agency types, what dispatchers are expected to do will also vary. However, these are common core duties:

- Primary and/or secondary Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) providing 911 callers access to public safety resources. This includes translation services and hearing or speech impaired translation if needed
- Accepting and evaluating incoming calls
- Radio dispatch services

- Follow-through on service requests (e.g., call for tow truck, notifications, coordination of coordinate several partner agencies on a large event, running vehicle registrations or warrants, etc.)
- Call out and emergency notifications

These duties are generally performed using technology that varies from simple to complex. Public safety dispatchers are required to multi-task in order to expedite the processing of information and/or requests. For example, public safety dispatchers must be able to question a caller at the same time they are entering/typing information into a computer. It is not as easy as it sounds but it is a skill that can be learned.

Dispatch Center Environment

The public safety dispatcher is the vital link between the citizen and field personnel. One or more dispatchers are involved in every call for service in some manner.

Dispatching is demanding work. There are situations where matters of life or death can depend on the public safety dispatcher. It can be stressful. It can be uneventful. It can be intense for many hours or just a few minutes. This roller coaster can take an emotional toll, as it can be all of these in one shift.

Regardless of the type of organization you work for, you will be expected to fulfill that agency's core mission. Public safety entities serve the public. Public safety dispatchers must meet the public's expectation of service while working within the confines of an organization's systems, policies, practices and procedures. The basic mission must be served.

The Policing Mission

As a public safety dispatcher, you should fully understand the scope of the modern policing mission and your role in that mission. There are four major elements:

1. Protect and serve the public
2. Enhance the quality of life
3. Generate and maintain public trust
4. Uphold individual liberties and Constitutional rights

The following table contains the primary policing role of the peace officer. However, the peace officer cannot complete these elements without the support and involvement of the public safety dispatcher.

1. PROTECT AND SERVE THE PUBLIC	<p>Enforce laws Detain, question, write citations, search, and arrest suspected violators of criminal laws, local ordinances, and traffic regulations.</p> <p>Ensure public safety and protect life and property Protect, rescue, and safeguard human life or property whenever they are endangered by criminal conduct, traffic accidents, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, or other causes.</p> <p>Preserve peace and public order Control crowds and handle public nuisances and disturbances of the peace.</p>
2. ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE	<p>Prevent crime Perform community education, problem-solving, and anti-gang/anti-drug activities.</p> <p>Reduce fear of crime Foster an environment where people feel free, safe, secure, and well protected, and confident in the ability of police agencies to protect and serve them.</p> <p>Solve community problems In collaboration with other agencies and the community, seek and implement solutions to problems.</p>
3. GENERATE AND MAINTAIN PUBLIC TRUST	<p>Generate and maintain public trust Practice and preserve professionalism and proficiency and avoid any conduct that discredits you or your agency.</p>
4. UPHOLD INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES AND CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS	<p>Uphold individual liberties and Constitutional rights Protect Constitutionally guaranteed liberties regarding freedom of speech, assembly, and religion; freedom from unreasonable arrests, searches and seizures; and the rights to remain silent, to an attorney, and to “due process” of law.</p> <p>Respect human rights and dignity Demonstrate the highest respect for human rights and dignity by treating all people with respect, and by violating privacy and using force only when reasonable and to the extent necessary to accomplish a proper policing purpose.</p>

Public safety dispatchers have a vital role in public safety. You will be introduced to values such as justice and respect for the laws that are central to professional policing and public safety dispatching. You will be expected to help those in crisis, both callers and officers, educate/inform the public and improve the quality of life in the community by having a role in the enforcement of laws.

Reflection

Given the above information, what role does the public safety dispatcher have in each of these missions?

PART 2

A Career in Public Safety Dispatching: What It Takes

The Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) can provide you with valuable information about public safety dispatching. From the POST website you can sign up for job alerts to find out who is hiring. You can also search for information and even obtain your training records once hired.

The title Public Safety Dispatcher (PSD) varies from agency to agency and position to position. In addition to the title of public safety dispatcher, other titles may include: communications officer, emergency services dispatcher, telecommunicator, call-taker, emergency technician, or police services representative. For the purposes of this document, the title *Public Safety Dispatcher* is all encompassing.

Pros and Cons of a Career in Public Safety Dispatching

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Compressed work week (i.e., longer shifts) may mean more days off■ Overtime opportunities■ No two days are alike■ Good pay for minimal education■ Good benefits (medical, dental, vision)■ Retirement plan(s)■ Short- and long-term disability■ Paid vacation and/or sick leave■ Paid holidays■ Camaraderie of a second family■ Education assistance/incentives■ Possibility of longevity bonus■ Lateral/experienced dispatchers can be in high demand■ Job security upon completion of probation■ Vital part of a team that “catches the bad guy”■ Requires critical thinking that can be rewarding■ Starting each day with a clean slate■ On-the-job, paid training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Paramilitary structure■ Grooming standards (e.g., tattoos, facial hardware, uniforms)■ Shift work — missed holidays and family events■ 24/7, 365 days a year operations■ Rigorous training program while being constantly evaluated by a trainer■ Possibility of mandated overtime■ Breaks and lunches are varied and not always possible at the opportune time■ Periods of intense concentration and attention■ Need to make quick decisions with limited information and possibly in life-threatening situations■ Media and public scrutiny

Selection Standards

Regardless of the job title be prepared for an intense and challenging experience. The hiring process for a public safety dispatcher can be arduous and lengthy. It is a process that may be several months in duration. The minimum selection standards for California dispatchers employed by POST-participating agencies are:

- Must be legally eligible for employment in the United States
- Assessment of verbal, reasoning, memory, and perceptual abilities (typically assessed in a written test)
- Assessment of oral communication abilities (typically assessed in an oral interview process)
- Fingerprints sent to the California Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Thorough background investigation based on an applicant's personal history statement/questionnaire
- Medical evaluation conducted by a licensed physician employed by the hiring department

Agencies may choose additional requirements or assessments, such as a high school diploma or GED, typing test, polygraph exam, and/or psychological evaluation.

Before you travel down this road, think about the investment and sacrifices you will need to make. The position of a public safety dispatcher is a true profession and can be a long, challenging, and rewarding career.

Your Work

Choose your work carefully.

We are what we do... the more we do it, the more we become it.

So, look beyond the superficial attractions of a particular job...consider what it will require you to do on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour, minute-to-minute basis. See if that is how you want to spend your time. If it is not, your job will become your prison rather than the vehicle of your dreams.

Work should be something that calls to you, that gives voice to who you are and what you want to say in the world. It should be a vocation.

If you find a vocation, you have found a way to contribute to the world with love.

Find what it is that burns in your heart and do it. Choose a vocation, not a job, and your life will have meaning and your days will have peace.

--- Excerpt from the book *Simple Truths*
by Kent Nerburn
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Do You Have What It Takes?

Public safety dispatchers are often the first contact the public has with an agency. It is important to make a good impression with each contact. The tone you set will impact the outcome of any call. You are required to maintain your composure and be professional during stressful situations. In order to do that, be honest with yourself when you answer these questions:

- Can you operate within a paramilitary organization with a highly organized chain-of-command?
- Can you work in a focused manner with intense concentration for extended periods of time?
- Can you work where someone is screaming at you or using obscene language without taking it personally?
- Do you think you can remain calm, gather information or dispatch units during a violent crime in progress?
- Can you make sound decisions quickly with limited information?

Perception Versus Reality

Public safety dispatching is a complex profession. Television and news media may portray incidents in a very simplistic manner. There is considerably more going on behind the scenes than is captured on a brief news clip. This may lead to a preconceived notion of what the job of a public safety dispatcher entails. Therefore, it is imperative that you carefully consider the challenges and rewards inherent in this position. Hard work, self-control, and the ability to keep a positive attitude in a challenging environment are required to be an exemplary public safety dispatcher.

Cognitive Abilities Required of a Public Safety Dispatcher

Four primary domains in cognitive abilities are the basis for the POST entry-level exam:

- **Verbal**
The ability to read, listen to information, identify facts, draw conclusions and write clearly
- **Reasoning**
The ability to apply general rules to specific problems to attain logical answers and the ability to correctly follow rules to arrange things or actions in a certain order
- **Memory**
The ability to store and retrieve facts, details, and other information
- **Perceptual**
The ability to quickly and accurately compare letters and numbers presented orally and in written form. The ability to shift back and forth between two or more sources of information; both written and oral

Personality Traits

There are personality traits that represent behavioral characteristics, attributes, and enduring patterns of behavior demonstrated by the manner in which people act under various conditions. They were developed on the basis of a variety of source materials and procedures described in the POST Job Analysis Report.

These traits are:

- Tolerance of stress
- Integrity
- Dependability
- Emotional control
- Tolerance of unpleasant work environment
- Adaptability
- Teamwork
- Maturity
- Productivity
- Positive attitude
- Assertiveness
- Social concern
- Motivation
- Interpersonal sensitivity

My Deputy

"My Deputy", a common term used by uncommon people, the dispatcher.

"My Deputy" can be heard in any dispatch center on any day.

It is usually being said by a Dispatcher trying to reassure a citizen that law enforcement is on the way.

To a Dispatcher, "My Deputy" is much more. It is an unspoken bond.

It is knowing I will always be with you on every call.

I will be searching for the things you cannot see, and I will be quick to send help when you need it.

Even though I sit miles away, know that I am always watching over you and praying for your safe return.

Captain S. Dicus
San Bernardino County Sheriff's Office
Reprinted with permission

Typical Tasks

Studies conducted from 1989 to 1991 and updated in [2011](#) by POST provide a good picture of what entry-level public safety dispatchers actually do. Tasks and duties vary from agency to agency. However, core knowledge and skills are identified.

Core training knowledge falls within ten general subject matter areas:

- Work environment and conduct
- Communications center operations
- Law
- Complaint-taking
- Dissemination of information
- Radio dispatching
- Law enforcement information systems
- Public safety-related agencies
- Communications center equipment and resources
- Training methods

The Testing Process

Pursuant to POST Commission Regulation [1957](#), public safety dispatcher applicants must be assessed for verbal, reasoning, memory, and perceptual abilities. These abilities must be evaluated prior to hire to assure the presence of ability levels commensurate with the performance of dispatcher duties, as measured by the POST Entry-Level Dispatcher Selection Test Battery (written exam) or alternative job-related tests of these abilities. Details of the written exam, along with sample questions, are included in the [POST Entry-Level Dispatcher Selection Test Battery Examinee Guide](#) (pdf).

The test will take approximately three hours and at this time POST does not charge a fee for the test. The test can be taken multiple times; however, there must be a wait period of one month before taking the exam again. This applies even if the exam is taken through a different department/agency than the original exam.

All answer sheets are sent to POST for processing. Upon receipt, POST electronically scans the answer sheets and renders a score report, referred to as a T-score, which includes a breakdown of each applicant's reading, writing, and total T-score. The score report is sent to the agency within five business days.

Some Things to Help You Prepare

- You are strongly encouraged to participate in sit-alongs and ride-alongs for the agencies in which you are interested.
- In addition, do your research for that agency. Find out how the organization is structured. Most agencies have a website that will have a great deal of information.
- Get to know the geographical area, demographics.
- Sign up for community alerts.
- In order to prepare for your interview, make a list of potential questions and practice your answers in front of a mirror, another person, or even record yourself.
- The more you do to prepare ahead of time, the more it will help you to perform at your absolute best!

Think About It

Why Do You Want to Become a Public Safety Dispatcher?

- Is your goal to help people?
- To have a fulfilling career?
- To earn a good living?
- To have a steady income with job security?
- To have a job where no two days are ever the same?
- To develop skills you can use elsewhere?
- To be an essential part of law enforcement?
- Or do you have grander goals?

Public safety dispatching offers extraordinary opportunities. What do you want out of life? You may find your life more rewarding if you identify and nurture personal ambitions that define your purpose. Take a moment to reflect and write down your answers to these questions:

- What gives my life meaning?
- How does my role as a public safety dispatcher fit in?
- What are my career and life objectives?
- What will success look like in 5, 10 or 20 years?

PART 3

Ethics and Values

During your training, you will hear many references to ethics. This attention is not merely academic. There are many real-life examples of how public safety dispatchers have made poor ethical decisions that have impacted their careers and the reputation of their departments. Many, unfortunately, have made national news. There are no get-out-of-jail cards, no tickets signed off, no free meals, and no free rides.

Four Essential Characteristics for Professional Success

A public safety dispatcher that exemplifies excellence, models these four essential characteristics:

1. GOOD CHARACTER	Ethical and moral strength demonstrated by six virtues: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship
2. PROFICIENCY	A high level of competence demonstrated by the knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgment necessary for the exemplary performance of all aspects of the agency's policing mission.
3. PROFESSIONALISM	Professionalism is demonstrated by the pursuit of the policing mission with honor, courage, composure, competence, and respect in a manner that upholds the highest standards of policing ethics, displays a commitment to continual self-improvement, and generates public trust, respect and confidence.
4. LEADERSHIP	Demonstrated by the ability to improve a situation or achieve a socially positive change by influencing the way others think and act and by the ability to take command of a situation.

Ethics and character are closely related. A person of character possesses worthy, admirable traits and virtues, and lives a life of honor based on ethical principles. Character is ethics in action both personally and professionally.

1. Good Character

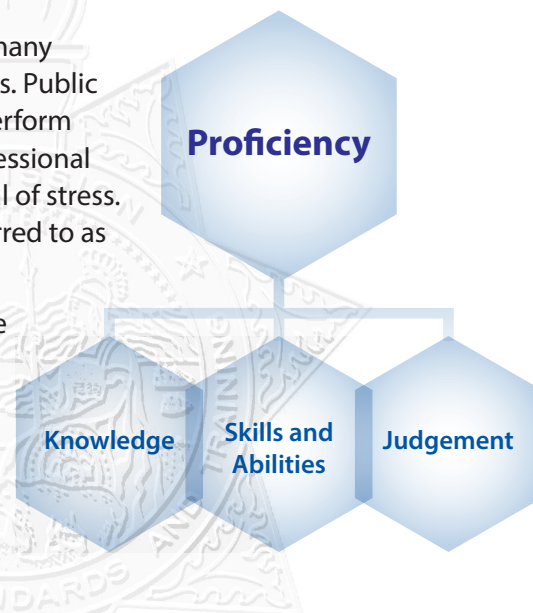
Good moral character is ethics in action built on the foundation of six major virtues. All of your conduct and decisions during training will be judged by these ethical principles: **trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship.**

- Think About It: Character
- Do you think your character is permanently established, or are you still capable of growing and choosing who you want to be and how you want to conduct your life?
- Could you become more or less honest?
- Could you decide to be more or less responsible?
- Could you increase your sensitivity to issues of individuality or respect or become more callous and cynical about certain populations (e.g., drug users, prostitutes, gang members, criminals)?
- Could an instructor, trainer or mentor teach you anything that will help you eliminate or reduce negative characteristics or instill or strengthen positive ones?

2. Proficiency

A public safety dispatcher will have many important and diverse responsibilities. Public safety dispatchers must be able to perform these duties with a high level of professional competence, often under a great deal of stress. This high level of competence is referred to as “proficiency.”

Most of your training will concentrate on what you need to know and do to be an exemplary public safety dispatcher. The essential elements of proficiency are **knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgment**. A major part of training will focus on developing these core proficiencies.



Knowledge

Public safety dispatchers will be required to learn, understand, and remember a great deal of information about the law, including:

- Constitutional law focusing on the Bill of Rights
- State laws
- Ordinances (city and county laws)
- State and local ethics rules
- Professional standards of conduct

Skills and Abilities

Public safety dispatchers will be expected to master a wide range of operational skills (e.g., how to properly code a call, how to effectively compose comments in a call, how to manage emergency traffic on the radio, etc.). These skills will be taught through simulations, practice and real-life experience.

One of the most difficult skills to master is multi-tasking. Multi-tasking is defined in the Merriam Webster dictionary as “the performance of multiple tasks at one time.” An example would be a public safety dispatcher’s ability to operate and manage a radio channel while handling an incoming telephone call. As you develop new skills or improve existing ones, remember that what is important is not just knowing what to do, but actually doing it — and doing it well on the job.

Judgment

As a public safety dispatcher, you will regularly face situations requiring you to exercise discretion and make decisions that will significantly impact others. All those affected by your decision have a stake in what you do. Thus, they are called stakeholders.

It’s not enough to avoid poor decisions. An exemplary public safety dispatcher makes exemplary decisions — decisions that produce the best possible results. Just as your ability to type can be improved through practice, your judgment can be enhanced as well.

3. Professionalism

Professionalism is demonstrated by the pursuit of the policing mission with courage, composure, competence, and respect in a manner that upholds the highest standards of policing ethics, displays a commitment to continual self-improvement, and generates public trust, respect, and confidence.



Elements of Professionalism

MISSION-FOCUSED	Focuses on all mission objectives and achieves as many as possible in every action.
COURAGE	Stands up for what is right with integrity and zeal despite physical, social or career risks.
COMPOSURE	Presents a bearing and demeanor characterized by poise, coolness, and self-control that inspire confidence in the public safety dispatcher's character and leadership.
COMPETENCE	Employs expert knowledge, excellent skills, and exemplary judgment in performing all tasks.
RESPECT	Treats all people with dignity and courtesy regardless of provocation.
ETHICS	Adheres to high standards of policing ethics (including the Six Pillars of Character®, the Five Principles of Public Service Ethics, government ethics laws and professional standards of conduct.
SELF-IMPROVEMENT	Engages in continual reflection and self-education to strengthen character and improve proficiency, professionalism and leadership.
TRUST	Behaves in a manner that inspires respect and trust.

4. Leadership

Leadership is one of the four critical qualities possessed by an exemplary public safety dispatcher. In training, you will have many opportunities to develop and demonstrate leadership skills.

Take Charge of Your Training Experience

One aspect of leadership is an ability to take charge of a situation and be responsible for making things better. Leadership is setting an example worth following.

If you view your upcoming training as the “situation” and your mastery of the curriculum as the successful outcome, you will see the opportunity to use leadership principles to help accomplish your goal.

Be Accountable

Effective leaders don't wait for the conditions of success; they create them. You can do the same in the Academy if you accept the fact that ***you alone are ultimately responsible for your education and professional development.***

For example, you may find some segments of your training boring. Some courses may seem too easy or others too hard. You may like some instructors and not others. The crucial point is, regardless of your opinion of the quality of any aspect of your training, you are required and expected to learn. Based on the principles of leadership and personal responsibility, ***you will be held accountable for acquiring the knowledge and skills you need to know.***

This means if you are confused by the content or overwhelmed by the amount of information you must learn, take charge of the situation and seek help in understanding the materials and/or developing more effective study strategies. If you are having difficulty mastering certain skills, practice until you are proficient.

Example

Taking Charge of Your Education

Dispatchers Owens and Ramirez are in a class on the introduction to law, including the difference between “burglary” and “theft.”

Both find the lectures boring and confusing. Dispatcher Owens complains about the poor instruction to fellow dispatchers and says, “How am I ever going to learn this stuff if this guy can’t teach?”

Dispatcher Ramirez seeks the help of others in class who seem to understand the concept, does some extra reading on his own and poses questions to the instructor.

- Which dispatcher is demonstrating leadership?
- Which dispatcher is likely to get the most out of the Academy education?
- Which dispatcher is likely to be more successful in dispatching?

Ninety-nine percent of the failures come from people who have the habit of making excuses.

— George Washington Carver
American scientist
1864-1943

Ethics

Ethics is a philosophy concerning human conduct. Ethics are standards of duty and virtue that define what is morally right, good, and proper. Public safety dispatchers are held to the same high ethical standards as peace officers.

Think About It: Ethics

- You handle a gruesome call at work. You get home and post details about the call on your social media page. Or, you instant message about calls you handle at work as they happen.
- You just got the job and are having drinks with friends to celebrate. You take a picture with your friends having a good time and post it to your social media page. The next day, you post a picture of yourself in your Class A uniform being sworn in.
- Running someone in the law enforcement telecommunications database out of curiosity, personal benefit, or financial gain.
- You call in a food order for the 911 center and get there only to find they won't charge you.

As a public safety dispatcher, whether on or off duty, your activities can have a negative impact on you, your career, and your agency. In addition, you are trusted with information that is confidential, personal and protected by law. You must not betray that trust.

The Six Pillars of Character®

A national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, the Josephson Institute of Ethics, identified six core ethical values that have been widely accepted by educational, governmental, and policing institutions as ethical principles that apply to all people. Called the *Six Pillars of Character*®, these values are the foundation of a national character education initiative called *Character Counts!*®.



Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness embodies four ethical obligations essential to personal credibility and public trust: integrity (consistency between beliefs, words, and actions), honesty (truthfulness, sincerity, and candor), promise-keeping, and loyalty.

Respect

Respect refers to the moral duty to treat all people with dignity regardless of what you think of them personally. There are two aspects to respect: verbal and physical. Respect is demonstrated by courtesy and professionalism. It is disrespectful and unprofessional to use profanity, to make racial, ethnic or gender slurs, to make sexual comments, or engage in other conduct that could reasonably be construed as rude, crude, tasteless, humiliating, or abusive.

Responsibility

Responsibility means being personally accountable for our choices and executing duties with professionalism and proficiency. It also means recognizing that our actions matter and we are morally on the hook for the consequences.

Fairness

Fairness is treating people equally; being consistent, being open-minded, giving people an opportunity to respond to accusations, and making decisions on the merits while avoiding favoritism, bias, or prejudice.

Caring

Caring is the heart of ethics, and ethical decision-making. It is scarcely possible to be truly ethical and yet unconcerned with the welfare of others. That is because ethics is ultimately about good relations with other people. Caring is being kind, compassionate, empathetic, charitable, and forgiving.

Citizenship

Citizenship as an ethical value does not refer to one's residence or status in one country or another. Rather, it speaks to one's duty to be a constructive, law-abiding, member of the community who honors the rule of law, and respects lawful authority, and abides by the letter and spirit of the law. Being a good citizen also involves meeting civic responsibilities by voting and participating in the processes of democracy. Good citizens also demonstrate a concern for the well-being of their neighbors and help protect the environment for future generations.

Government Codes of Ethics

As public employees, public safety dispatchers are bound by a broad set of ethical principles providing an overarching set of standards that require public servants to use their governmental authority in a manner that produces and preserves public trust.

If public safety dispatching functions are not performed ethically, there will be no public trust. Therefore, conduct deemed to be unethical would be grounds for discipline, including termination.

Because public servants have special responsibility to generate and preserve public trust, they must abide by complex state and local government ethics codes governing such issues as misuse of authority, misuse of confidential information, or conflicts of interest. Some examples are:

- Accepting gratuities
- Evading tickets or tow fees
- Providing confidential law enforcement information to unauthorized persons (e.g., personal access of confidential information, intentionally leaking sensitive law enforcement information)
- Using your position for private gain (e.g., accepting money for confidential information, directing calls to a favored provider such as a tow company or private ambulance company)

Professional Codes of Ethics and Conduct

One of the elements that define a profession is the requirement that its members adhere to a code of conduct, and public safety professionals are bound by a set of ethical rules. They have a duty to help people in danger and they are limited to what they can say and do. The International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) and the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) are larger organizations with a code of ethics or code of conduct that guide public safety dispatchers. These can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Remember, professional ethical duties supplement, they do not replace the universal ethical obligations of the Six Pillars of Character®. You will be held responsible to your agency's Code of Ethics and Conduct.

The Five Principles of Public Service Ethics

To prevent corruption, waste, and abuse of authority, every state and many local government entities have adopted laws that apply to public employees, including public safety dispatchers. In general these laws:

1. Prohibit using public office for private gain

Public office is to be used only to advance public interests, not personal gain. These rules include limitations on accepting gifts, gratuities, and favors (including special discounts), and using public property for personal purposes.

2. Define and regulate conflicts of interest

Public employees must exercise objective judgment and act in the best interests of the public. Decisions are to be made on the merits, free of partiality or prejudice, and unimpeded by conflicts of interest. Detailed laws require public servants to identify and avoid conflicts of interest that could impede their objective judgment (including rules governing outside employment).

3. Require openness and accountability

Government is to be conducted openly, efficiently, equitably, and honorably so the public can make informed judgments and hold public officials accountable. The Brady Rule, created by the courts, imposes special accountability standards requiring agencies to make available to defense attorneys information in a public safety employee's file that may bear on honesty and integrity.

4. Demand that public employees abide by the spirit as well as the letter of the law

Public employees are required to honor the spirit as well as the letter of the law. Gamesmanship strategies and legalistic tactics that evade the law and undermine public policy are unethical.

5. Require public employees to avoid even the appearance of impropriety

All public servants must safeguard public confidence in the integrity of the government by avoiding appearances of impropriety and conduct unbefitting their office. In order to maintain public trust, it is especially important that public safety dispatchers scrupulously conduct their professional and personal lives in a manner that never tarnishes their profession.

Don't hesitate to seek advice via the chain of command whenever you face a choice that ***might*** be governed by these laws. Once you understand the basic philosophy of the Five Principles of Public Service Ethics, you will be better able to avoid legal entanglements.

Mission Statements and Core Values

When agencies have mission statements and defined core values, it is important that exemplary public safety dispatchers align to this mission in their day-to-day duties. In correlation, the expectation is for public safety dispatchers to come to work every day, prepared to be a top performer and meet or exceed the standards set. Examples of mission statements can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Think About It: Mission Statement and Core Values

- Make a list of your core values.
- If you were to write a mission statement for your life, what would it be?
- If you were to write a mission statement for your first year as a trainee, what would it be?

Potential Conflicts Between Professional and Personal Values

As a public safety dispatcher, you may run into situations where your personal beliefs conflict with your professional duties. For example, your beliefs on abortion, civil rights, or political protests may conflict with your duty to create or dispatch calls permitting officers to enforce laws and protect others.

Your success in public safety depends on your ability to do your duty regardless of your personal beliefs. Failure to understand this can lead to serious consequences for you, your agency, and your profession.

Examples

- A caller reports her 13-year-old child has been out partying all night and the dispatcher sarcastically says, "You let your child do that?" (Your tone and emphasis on the phone injects your personal values into the situation.)
- You receive a call from a child who says his mother is sleeping and you berate them for playing on the phone. You create a call and assign it a low priority. (Calls will come in where the caller cannot articulate the specifics of what has happened. In this case, the mother was ill and unconscious on the floor.)
- A caller inquires about the time of a meeting. You ask the caller if she knows she called 911 and she states 'yes.' She again asks about the time of the meeting and what kind of dish she should bring. You ask if this is an emergency and she states 'yes'. The conversation goes back and forth several times and doesn't seem to make much sense. Eventually, you hang up in frustration. (Callers may be in a life-threatening position that will not allow them to relate specific details. In this particular case, the woman and her daughter had been forcibly taken to a location and held against their will. The suspect was close enough to hear the caller and the caller did not want him to know she had called the police.)
- A caller reports "they were robbed". As you question the caller you determine their home was broken into and burglarized. You proceed to tell the caller that is not a robbery. It is a burglary. (The public, in general, does not understand the differences in laws. You as the professional do, and should proceed to categorize and prioritize the call correctly without chastising the caller.)
- An officer arrives on a call and immediately requests you call the reporting party back and ask them to step outside. (You immediately think, 'how lazy can you be'. Can't the officer knock on the door? When in reality the addresses are not clearly marked.)



PART 4

You've Got the Job – Now What?

Congratulations!

Your first experience as a newly hired public safety dispatcher will depend on your agency's training program. Your first day may simply be completing required paperwork, a tour of the agency and introduction to key personnel. Or, your first day could be classroom training or immediate on-the-job training with a Communications Training Officer (CTO). The one thing every agency will have in common is their high expectations of a new employee.

Expectations

Communities and public safety agencies expect a high level of performance from public safety dispatchers. Decisions must be made accurately and without hesitation.

Community expectations

- High quality of service
- Empathetic
- Knowledgeable
- Professional
- Quick response

Agency expectations

- Learn and embrace the mission statement and core values in the completion of job duties
- Learn and apply the policies and procedures
- Invest in the agency and your community
- Be courteous and professional at all times
- Be accountable; take responsibility for your actions, your professional and personal growth

The POST Public Safety Dispatcher Program

The POST Public Safety Dispatcher Program is established under Regulation [1018](#). It states, “The Commission shall establish a Public Safety Dispatcher Program for the purpose of raising the level of competence of public safety dispatchers having primary responsibility for providing dispatching services for local law enforcement agencies listed in Penal Code Section [13510 \(a\)](#).”

Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Dispatchers

The POST Administrative Manual (PAM) states that every public safety dispatcher shall satisfactorily complete the POST-certified Public Safety Dispatchers’ Basic Course before or within 12 months after the date of appointment, promotion, reclassification, or transfer to a public safety dispatcher position.

In addition to the basic course, every public safety dispatcher, and public safety dispatch supervisor, shall also satisfactorily complete 24 hours of Continuing Professional Training (CPT) every two years.

Probation Period

Every full-time employed public safety dispatcher after hire shall demonstrate competence in the performance of the duties of a public safety dispatcher by satisfactory completion of a probationary period of at least 12 months.

From a CTO

“Training a new person is a huge responsibility but I want to make an investment in my dispatch center. I look at this stressful process as “you will be my backup one day.” My expectation of you is foremost, you will be open-minded, willing to try, and I need you to trust me. My biggest fear is letting you down. I’m your biggest cheerleader/supporter. Let me help you succeed.”

POST Basic Dispatcher Course

The [Public Safety Dispatchers’ Basic Course](#) introduces the necessary skills and knowledge to work in a law enforcement communications center in a productive and professional manner. The course also prepares each student for the basic roles, responsibilities, and duties of a public safety dispatcher within the law enforcement agency.

As specified in POST Commission Regulation [1018](#), the Public Safety Dispatchers’ Basic Course is the entry-level training requirement for dispatchers employed by agencies participating in POST Public Safety Dispatcher Program. Many courses are offered at the community college level and open to interested individuals not yet hired by an agency. Information on the POST-certified Public Safety Dispatchers’ Basic Course can be found in POST’s [Course Catalog](#).

The Public Safety Dispatchers' Basic Course has a minimum requirement of 120 hours, which is divided into 14 individual topics, called Learning Domains (LDs). Content and minimum hourly requirements are:

Learning Domain	Title	Hours
LD 100	Professional Orientation and Ethics	8
LD 101	Criminal Justice System	4
LD 102	Introduction to Law	12
LD 103	Interpersonal Communications	4
LD 104	Telephone Technology and Procedures	12
LD 105	Missing Persons	4
LD 106	Domestic Violence	4
LD 107	Community Policing/Cultural Diversity/Hate Crimes Gang Awareness	8
LD 108	Child, Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse	4
LD 109	Law Enforcement Telecommunications	8
LD 110	Radio Technology and Procedures	12
LD 111	Resources and Referral Services	2
LD 112	Critical Incidents	16
LD 113	Wellness Management	4
	Supporting Instructional Activities/Exercises	18
	Total	120

POST Professional Certificates

Public Safety Dispatcher certificates are professional certificates awarded in recognition of meeting specified training and service requirements. Possession of these certificates is voluntary and is not required to perform dispatcher duties. Certificate levels include Basic, Intermediate, Advanced and Supervisory. Requirements vary for each level. For more information, check POST Regulation [1011 \(c\)](#).

The Training Experience

This is a stressful career and it begins with your training. Support is available through peers, chaplain programs, employee assistance programs, and therapists. However, it is important you maintain a healthy lifestyle and have a good support system in your friends and family.

Throughout your training and career, instructors, CTOs, supervisors and managers will strive to help you reach your professional potential. The Public Safety Dispatcher Basic Training Course (referred to as the Academy) is a school for professionals, and you must be a serious and conscientious student if you are to succeed.

Examples

Trainee 1 “I wanted to get into dispatch because of the experience, the adrenaline, and the opportunity to help people. Becoming a public safety dispatcher had always been my career goal and I was passionate and prepared to work hard and invest my time. Going into training I thought I knew what to expect and never realized the true sacrifice it took to succeed. The amount of information that I needed to know, the time it took and the impact on my daily life, was all consumed by training and the job. I could have never prepared myself for the amount of effort I had to put forth in learning the material. I was fortunate to start at a smaller agency, I was the very first entry level dispatcher there so not only was it new for me, it was new for the them as well. Sitting in a room alone, with just myself and my trainer and a binder the size of a cinder block, I knew I was in for something bigger than I imagined. In the four weeks I was in my academy I had to learn an entirely new language, a new culture if you will. It was like nothing I had ever experienced. Not only was it overwhelming at times but also was almost impossible to not feel discouraged. Failing was not an option. I was going to succeed, no matter what it took. I realized that I had to take every day one day at a time and although I was told not to take work home with me I knew I had to push the limits and myself in order to succeed. This made a huge impact in my social life and in my normal daily routine. My days at the gym were less than I liked, my friends and unfortunately my family were even put on the back burner. Codes ran through my mind constantly and repeating the phonetic alphabet was something I did every day on my way home. I wanted to succeed so badly that nothing around me mattered until I finished the academy and passed my training. Almost a year into dispatching I still am learning something new everyday and am grateful that I stuck with it.”

Trainee 2 “I started my training with five fellow new hires at our in-house academy. We discussed numerous different topics to get us prepared for the journey we had ahead of us. Although our courses were detailed with in-depth discussion, I don’t believe anything could have prepared us for our first day in the communications center. My trainer had me listen to her take a few calls, then put me in the hot seat. My hands were trembling with nerves, but with my trainer’s guidance, she eased me through the call. This was when I realized the “tough love” between CTO’s and trainees. Her expectations were high, but she was only preparing me for the reality of a dispatcher. The true expectation is that of the citizen. They are calling on their worst possible day, seeking some type of assistance in order to resolve their emergency. With this in mind, I knew I was prepared to sacrifice anything needed in order to help that citizen in a time of crisis. Instead of spending time with family and friends, I was reviewing my notes to help me become a proficient dispatcher. Dispatching is not only a career, but it has become a part of who I am. Expectations are high and sacrifices are made, but it is all worth it when you are able to make a difference in someone’s life.”

Examples (cont)

Trainee 3 “Many dispatch centers handle fire or medical calls as well as law calls. Less than six weeks after I completed my training as an Emergency Medical Dispatcher, I used my new skills to save my father’s life. I was chatting casually on the phone to my elderly mother one afternoon. She suddenly called out to my dad, “You are getting blood all over that shirt too.” Since my dad is a heart patient on blood thinners, I knew this was very serious. I asked my mother what was going on. She said, “ Oh, he has a nosebleed and it is a mess. This is the second shirt he has soaked with blood.” Before my training, I would not have known how to help. I don’t think I would have even realized the serious nature of the problem. I automatically swung into dispatcher mode. I said, “Mom, listen carefully and I will tell you exactly what to do. This is the first thing you are supposed to say to callers when you need to provide medical instructions. I told my mom to have my dad sit straight in his chair, keep his head level and pinch the lower fleshy part of his nose together. I must have developed a command presence too, because she relayed my instructions to my dad. I waited on the line until my mom said (in surprise) “It stopped! When I was sure the situation was stable, I called the dispatch center for an ambulance. My dad spent a few days in the hospital and made a good recovery. It was amazing to me to personally use my new skills to help my own family. My confidence in my career choice soared. I saw first hand that saving a life can be done by a properly trained dispatcher What would have been the result if I had not made the decision to become a dispatcher? I don’t really want to imagine. When your trainer says to you, “Imagine the caller is your grandmother” sometimes it may actually be true.”

Communications Training Program

The Training Program is a structured training process specific to the job competencies required by a public safety dispatcher. These competencies are directly linked to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and tasks performed by public safety dispatcher within a communications center. An important aspect of this training includes the on-the-job training provided to trainees by CTOs.

You may receive comprehensive evaluations written by your CTOs. Evaluations contain specific statements related to actual job performance and demonstrated job knowledge.

The goal is to assure that trainees have strong critical thinking, problem-solving and leadership skills, and a keen sense of who they are and how their work will be performed. The test of your training will be your ability to do all you are required to do in stressful, fluid, and uncertain situations.

Once released from training, you will have a great deal of power and broad discretion on how to deal with circumstances. Consequently, heavy emphasis will be placed on problem solving and decision-making during your training. The objective will be to teach you how to make exemplary decisions that effectively, legally, and ethically achieve the best possible result.

Remember, however, training is only the initial phase of your professional development. The second phase will be where you will apply and refine your skills and knowledge in real-life situations.

In the Trenches

Once you begin to understand your role and how the training is conducted, you can consider yourself in the trenches! For example, your trainer just ran a warrant, and the return comes up on the computer screen. You have just read the first line or two of text. All of a sudden your trainer is whipping through the pages on the computer screen. You have no clue what they are seeing. You can't read that fast and you think you will never be able to go through a warrant that quickly! Yes, it may seem impossible at first, but eventually it will all make sense. Here are some ways to make it happen:

Take Charge of Your Training Experience

View your training as if you were building a house. The Academy and basic classroom training can be considered the foundation for your house. How much you invest in learning will determine the strength of your foundation. Training and guidance from your CTOs adds walls, windows and a roof to the house. How you apply what you have learned furnishes and decorates the house. The question is, will your house be a mansion, rickety shack, or something in between?

Be Accountable

Exemplary public safety dispatchers don't wait for the conditions of success; they create or seize the opportunity when it is presented. You can do the same if you accept the fact you alone are ultimately responsible for your education and professional development.

It is not uncommon for public safety dispatchers to feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they must learn or confused by the content during training. Take charge of the situation and seek help in understanding the materials and/or developing more effective study and learning strategies.

Some topics may seem easy to learn and others more difficult to master. You may like some trainers and not others. The crucial point is, regardless of your opinion of the quality of any aspect of your training, you are required and expected to learn. Based on the principles of leadership and personal responsibility, you will be held accountable for acquiring the knowledge and skills you need to know to be proficient at your job.

Techniques and Approaches

You will learn many new things during your training that will help you become an exemplary public safety dispatcher. With practice and exposure, public safety dispatching skills will soon become second nature. In order to gain competence and confidence, adult learners may benefit from the following techniques:

- **Prepare**

Read assigned materials. Reflect on the important points you want to remember or questions you want to ask.

- **Participate**

Listen attentively, ask questions, volunteer answers, and actively participate in your training.

- **Study and review**

Training requires diligent study. Use study groups to enhance retention. Look up words and terms you don't understand.

- **Practice**

Practice skills and techniques you have learned. Examples of this type of practice may include, phonetically reading license plates as you drive, typing what you hear while watching television, familiarize yourself with geography and directions by taking a different route home every day.

Balancing Humility and Self-Confidence

While confidence is essential as you learn the aspects of the position, the public safety dispatcher must maintain an open mind and be flexible as new skills are introduced and expectations increase. Each person comes into training with a different background. Experience in the military, growing up in a public safety family or working similar civilian positions may give some a head start. Some may have academic credentials and some may not.

Wherever you are in this mix, don't be discouraged or intimidated. If you feel you have fallen behind, persistent effort and a positive attitude may be all you need to catch up. On the other hand, if your experience or skills give you an initial advantage, don't get complacent or arrogant. There is still much to learn – even in areas you think you know. Despite similarities and common elements of previous experiences, public safety dispatching is different from anything you've done before.

Staying Positive

You will get the most out of training and your career if you maintain an upbeat outlook on your life, your position, and society. The power of positive attitude cannot be overstressed. Beware of negativity, which can lead to cynicism.

Public safety exposes you to negative situations. Let's face it; no one calls 911 because they are having a good day. If you are not careful, you may begin to look at everyone with a cynical eye. You may begin to think no one appreciates all you do as a public servant. This, of course, is untrue. You must remind yourself that the vast majority of people are hard working, honest folks who need and appreciate your assistance.

One way to fight cynicism is to regularly review your day and identify the positive moments where you made a difference or someone expressed gratitude. Celebrate your successes!

Think About It: Taking Charge of Your Training

A proactive trainee makes flash cards to study codes and laws, creates their own quick reference or study guides and offers to share them.

A passive trainee expects the agency to provide them with the techniques necessary to study.

- How can you get the most out of your training?
- How can taking initiative lead to success as a public safety dispatcher?
- How do you want to be perceived?
- Do you have a plan to succeed?
- Do you know when to take a break? Sometimes walking away or putting it down for a few minutes is the best solution. This helps you return to it with a fresh set of eyes and a clearer mind.

PART 5

The Exemplary Public Safety Dispatcher

Attributes of an Exemplary Public Safety Dispatcher

An Exemplary Public Safety Dispatcher is

- A team player
- Flexible
- Organized
- Compassionate
- Honest and has integrity
- Dedicated to the position and the profession
- Understanding of the community's needs
- Continually striving for personal growth and improvement
- Thinking beyond “right now” to anticipate needs and situations
- A problem solver
- A positive leader
- A mentor
- Supportive of the agency and personnel

Reflection Activity

Based on what you have read so far, identify the attributes you already possess to help you develop into an exemplary public safety dispatcher. Is your list short? If so, create a plan to develop the skills you may not yet possess. What are some ways you can do this? Find a mentor. Talk to your trainer. Find the “rock star” at your agency to emulate. Find someone who just completed their first year and talk to them. Since the attributes of an exemplary public safety dispatcher are crucial, further exploration of these qualities should help guide you through your first year.

Staying Engaged

When you first begin your career, you are enthusiastic and proud of the profession. It is an accomplishment to make it through the hiring process. The dynamic and quickly changing nature of the profession often develops unforeseen consequences such as apathy and complacency, which are two enemies of an exemplary public safety dispatcher. Both will affect you and your co-workers decision-making at some point in your career.

Apathy is a lack of concern, suppression of emotion, or belief that you cannot make a difference. For example, you get to the point where you answer a call about an infant not breathing and your tone lacks empathy.

Complacency is not recognizing or not caring about the risk of your actions. For example, when an alarm goes off all the time, you think it is a nothing call when in reality it is a burglary in progress this time.

Leadership

Leadership is not simply a matter of rank or official authority. Your conduct as a public safety dispatcher will impact the actions of others. An exemplary public safety dispatcher has good leadership skills. Two aspects of leadership are:

- **Command presence:** This is the ability to take command and direct others in a manner that effectively responds to the needs of a situation. A leader is someone others expect to take charge. Public safety dispatchers do not typically think of the command presence they have simply because they are not face-to-face with individuals. The command presence can be portrayed over the phone just as easily as face-to-face. You use your tone and verbiage to provide direction or instruction to callers. You may be required to relay the instructions of a police officer, e.g., "Put the gun down and come out with your hands up." When you relay the instructions of the officer, you are going to be seen as an authority on your first day of work. You must project confidence at all times.
- **Personal influence:** Another aspect of leadership is the ability to influence the way others think or act to improve a situation or achieve a socially positive change. This is achieved through the ethical use of authority, persuasion, and/or personal credibility. Your bias towards a caller has the potential to negatively impact an officer's response. Your attitude at work can impact everyone you contact. What you say about a policy change can impact the way co-workers think and react.

Leaders know how to discover, learn from and make positive use of the knowledge, skills, and talents each person brings to a situation. Take time to note and appreciate the diversity of your classmates, co-workers, trainers, instructors and supervisors. Everyone at any level of the organization has the potential to be a leader and influence outcomes.

Reflection Activity

Recognizing you may experience apathy and/or complacency during your career, it is important to develop strategies to manage both. How would you elaborate and incorporate these successful techniques?

- Maintaining a balance between home life and work
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- Not losing your personal identity
- Maintaining friendships outside the workplace
- Developing a strong support system

Maybe today is not your day of riding the wave of apathy or complacency but your co-worker may benefit from your support if they are struggling with these challenges. Simple methods of support could be:

- An encouraging smile
- A Post-It™ note with a smiley face
- A pat on the back
- A thank you
- An acknowledgement of a difficult call

Although apathy and complacency may look different for each individual, it is everyone's responsibility to take measures to overcome these enemies and raise the level of awareness.

Aspects of an Exemplary Decision

Every day, public safety dispatchers must make critical decisions. Poor decisions can jeopardize lives, destroy relationships, and undermine credibility. Exemplary decisions can save lives, enhance relationships, and strengthen careers. A major objective of training will be to improve critical thinking, judgment, and decision-making.

The Quality of a Decision

Public safety dispatching decisions can be ranked as poor, acceptable, good, and exemplary. In training, you will be taught the differences to help you avoid poor choices and make good and exemplary decisions.

All Decisions Must Have at Least Three Dimensions

1. They must be legal
2. They must be ethical
3. They must be effective

The distinction between an acceptable, good, and exemplary decision is found in its level of effectiveness. The objective is to obtain the best possible result.

Decision Making: From Poor to Exemplary

POOR DECISION	<p>A poor decision is unacceptable because it is illegal, unethical, and/or ineffective.</p> <p><i>For example: A caller is very difficult to understand over the phone due to a speech impediment and the dispatcher assumes the caller is under the influence and does not create a call for service.</i></p>
ACCEPTABLE DECISION	<p>An acceptable decision legally, ethically, and effectively accomplishes only the primary policing purpose.</p> <p><i>For example: A caller is very difficult to understand over the phone due to a speech impediment. The dispatcher creates a call for service to check the welfare of the individual.</i></p>
GOOD DECISION	<p>A good decision legally, ethically, and effectively accomplishes the primary policing purpose without causing unintended and/or undesirable consequences.</p> <p><i>For example: A caller is very difficult to understand over the phone due to a speech impediment. The dispatcher asks a few additional questions and creates a call for service.</i></p>
EXEMPLARY DECISION	<p>An exemplary decision employs expert knowledge, excellent skills, and exemplary judgment in performing all tasks.</p> <p><i>For example: A caller is very difficult to understand over the phone due to a speech impediment. The dispatcher adjusts her tone and rate of speech so the caller can provide additional information in a manner that is more easily understood. This information is more pertinent to field response and the call can be coded and dispatched properly. The fact the caller has a speech impediment is also relayed to the responding officers.</i></p>

Think About It

Would you make that same decision about that same caller if it were your grandmother?

The Legal Dimension of a Decision

The first requirement of every public safety dispatching decision is legality. **A decision is legal if it complies with the Constitution, state and local statutes, and agency policies.** This does not mean you memorize Constitutional amendments and state laws but you understand which laws apply, such as the difference between robbery and a burglary. You will gain a substantial working knowledge of the law, agency policies and the ability to find out efficiently what you don't know. This is an aspect of proficiency.

Effective Decisions Consider:

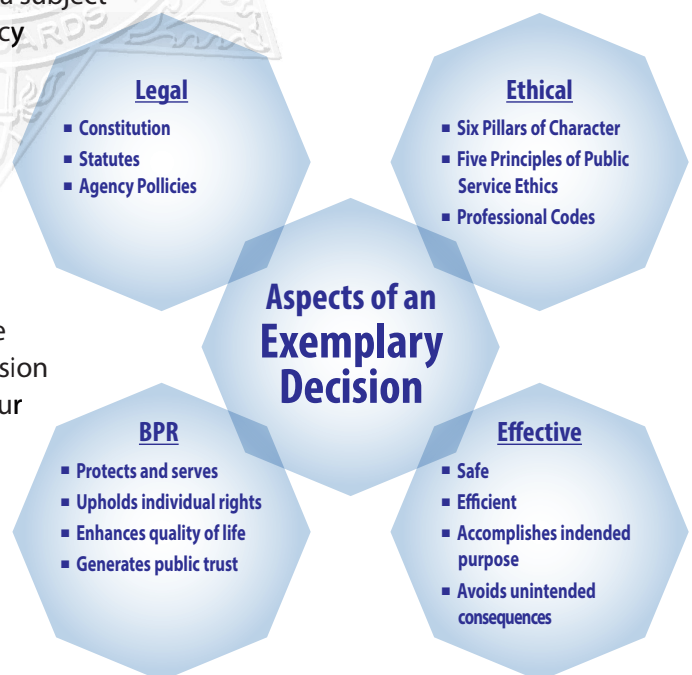
- **Safety**
Reduces the risk of injury or danger to victims, bystanders, perpetrators, suspects, and officers.
- **Efficiency**
Accomplishes the goal using the least amount of time, effort, personnel, and money.
- **Purpose**
Accomplished without causing unintended and undesirable consequences.

In public safety dispatching, the ends and means are inextricably intertwined. This diagram illustrates how all the elements of a decision are considered.

A decision that accomplishes either or both of the first two elements (Legal and/or Ethical) but creates widespread public distrust and disapproval because it violates either or both of the other two Best Possible Results (BPR) and/or Effective is usually counterproductive.

There are numerous incidents portrayed by media where dispatchers have used their lawful discretion and/or followed policy but the end result was tragic. An exemplary decision-maker is always aware of potential negative public reaction and while this consideration should not dictate public safety dispatching behavior, it may influence it.

Public safety dispatching is guided by policies, procedures, and practices. Public safety dispatchers have discretion in situations that are not black and white. You may need to think outside the box, but within the policing mission. For example, you could receive a call from a subject locked out of his vehicle. Policy dictates your agency does not respond to lockouts. However, this subject is a diabetic and in desperate need of medication locked inside their vehicle. The exemplary public safety dispatcher is familiar with the agency's core values and mission statement, which indicates our duty, is to protect life and property and will take action to help.



Another example is the fact that public safety dispatchers need accurate locations in order to send the right people to the right place. Fixing maps and addresses is not usually part of the public safety dispatcher's job duties and certainly not part of the trainee's duties. However, a wrong address could prevent a citizen from receiving timely help in an emergency. A dispatch trainee was on her day off, enjoying a run on a local jogging trail in a city park. The trainee noticed the solar powered emergency trail telephones had been dug up and removed. The trainee was quite surprised, as the phones had been installed, with great fanfare, several years before. The phones were installed in the wake of several dangerous incidents, including a murder, which occurred on the trail. The phones were lines that rang directly into the 911 center and gave the exact trail location when the phone receiver was lifted. The trainee could have decided this was fine and none of her business. However, the trainee was concerned, not just for her safety but for the safety of everyone who used the trails. She wrote a short memo describing her concern and gave it to her supervisor. The memo went to the person in charge of mapping and addressing. It was later discovered new phones were scheduled to be installed, with no public notice and without the connection to the 911 center. Because the trainee understood her job on a larger scale, and made the extra effort, the phones were reprogrammed and have since been used several times since by citizens seeking help. Going above and beyond can help make an exemplary public safety dispatcher.



Beware of advice from others that may reflect erroneous or unacceptable views about the law, agency policies, or good public safety dispatching practices. You may be challenged to make decisions based on co-workers style, opinion or assumptions that contradict policy, procedure or the policing mission. This is where you have to be open and analytical to carefully evaluate your decision-making.

Making Suggestions for Improvement

Work smarter, not harder. Exemplary public safety dispatchers bring forward suggestions for improving the workflow, creative suggestions or ideals for improving policies and procedures. Be willing to voice your opinion in a positive manner following the chain of command at the appropriate time. Be cautious of falling into the habit of complaining versus bringing forward solutions to problems. Be engaged!

Reflection Activity

Now that you have read this chapter, what would you add or take away from the list of attributes you made at the beginning of this chapter and why?

PART 6

Looking Beyond Training

Training is never over. There is constant change in this profession and training updates are needed. It is also imperative you stay on top of technology, trends, and policy or procedure changes. What you do every day will build on this. Learn to embrace and master those changes!

Education

Throughout training, there will be formal and informal parts to your education. The formal parts include what your instructors and trainers teach and what is contained in your course materials and agency manuals; the informal part is what you learn from listening to classmates, fellow public safety dispatchers, and others. It may also include self-directed training such as:

- Receiving alerts related to the 911 industry
- Playing what-if scenarios
- Reviewing audio recordings or other computer events
- Observing and emulating exemplary dispatchers
- Enhancing your jurisdictional/geographical knowledge
- Ride alongs and/or observing in other centers
- Reading professional publications
- Being aware of available resources such as the [POST website](#), [POST Learning Portal](#), [training videos](#), etc.
- Creating training resources and materials for your own use, such as quick reference or study guides and flash cards

Professional Development

Now you are a public safety dispatcher, released to work on your own. Is this what you will be doing every day for the rest of your career? What else is there? There are a number of opportunities for growth and professional development available, depending on the agency:

- College education (many agencies offer degree incentives)
- Emergency Number Professional ([ENP](#)) certification /NENA
- Emergency Medical Dispatcher ([EMD](#)) certification/International Academy of Emergency dispatch or other specialized program approved by regional medical authorities

- Registered Public-Safety Leader (RPL) certification/[APCO](#)
- Communications Training Officer (CTO)
- Lead or Senior Dispatcher
- Tactical or Incident Dispatcher
- Hostage/Crisis Negotiator
- Instructor [[POST Instructor Development Institute \(IDI\)](#)]
- Supervisor
- Manager
- Director or Commander
- In-house briefing or academy trainer

Have a Positive Impact on Your Profession

Never underestimate the impact you may have on your agency, community, or your career. The general public does not understand the public safety process. You can extend your influence outside the communications center by involvement in:

- Public education
- Community projects
- [911 for Kids](#)
- Professional organizations (APCO, NENA, etc.)
- Volunteer work (domestic violence centers, homeless shelters, suicide hotlines, etc.)
- Recruiting/job fairs
- Committee assignments (internal and external, e.g., POST)

This type of initiative and involvement will help you build professional skills and knowledge. You are never JUST a dispatcher! Stay productive and involved on and off duty! Honor your profession on a regular basis!

Examples

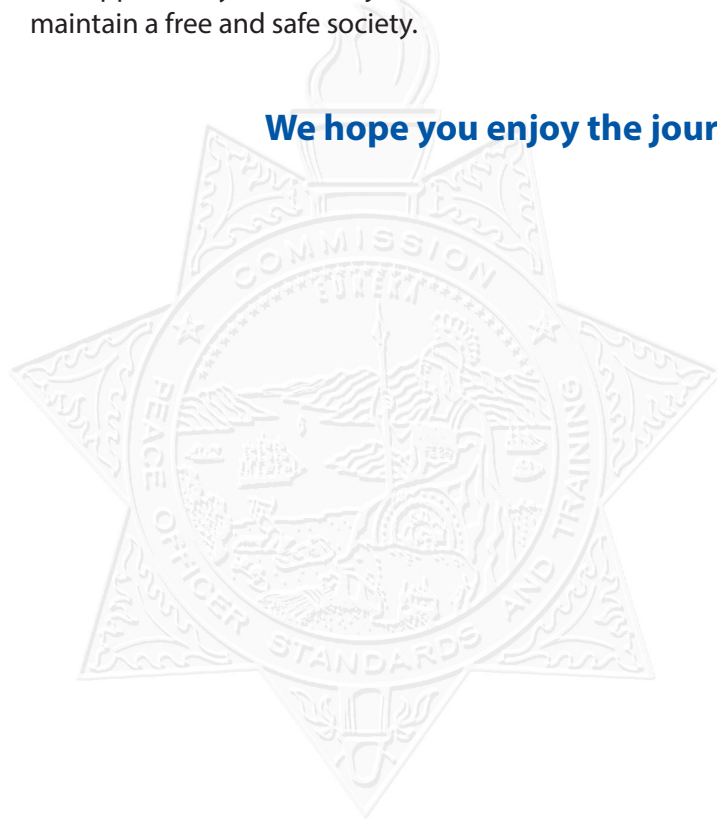
- Staying alert to changes in your community and sharing that information with your co-workers. For example, a dispatcher living 40 miles from work, but still within jurisdiction, notices a new AM/PM Mini Mart being built next to the freeway. They often get callers who only say, "I'm at the AM/PM" of which there are 3 or more in your jurisdiction.
- On your way to your child's event, you stop for dinner and the wait staff is very attentive to your needs. You think to yourself, they would make a great dispatcher and what an opportunity to recruit!

The Future of Dispatching

Today's Public Safety Dispatchers are recognized as the *first*, first responder. Public safety dispatchers are a vital member of the public safety mission and team. They are no longer the faceless voice behind the scenes. Public safety dispatchers are making national headlines every day.

This career will continue to evolve over time due to technological advancements, societal expectations, and changes in the laws and our agencies. You are on the threshold of a life-changing experience and a profession that will give you a rare opportunity to be a major force in the lives of others as well as helping to maintain a free and safe society.

We hope you enjoy the journey.





PART 7

Frequently Asked Questions

Where Do I Find Jobs?

There are a number of ways to find position openings in this field. For example:

- City, county, state and personnel websites
- Libraries
- POST [Job Opportunities](#)
- Craig's list
- www.jobsin911.com
- www.jobs.ca.gov
- POST [Law Enforcement Job Opportunities Listing](#)
- Job Fairs/Career Days
- Professional magazines such as Mission Critical, 911 Magazine, Dispatch Monthly, etc.
- Word-of-mouth (ask an officer or firefighter)

How Do I Prepare for the Hiring Process?

Obtain an application and fill it out completely. Do not leave anything blank. Download the Personal History Statement (POST Form 2-255) from the POST website and create your master copy. Be prepared for a lengthy process including an extensive background investigation.

How are T-scores Determined?

When POST electronically scans test answers, statistical calculations are performed to convert raw test scores (the number of items answered correctly) into "T-scores." T-scores are standardized scores that place an individual applicant's performance on the test into a distribution (bell-shaped curve) with a midpoint (average) of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. If an applicant's score falls around 50, his/her performance is considered "average" when compared to other applicants who have taken the test. If an applicant's score is 40 or below, his/her performance is considered "below average" when compared to other applicants who have taken the test. If an applicant's score is 60 or above, his/her performance is considered "above average" when compared to other applicants who have taken the test. Given the diverse needs of California law enforcement

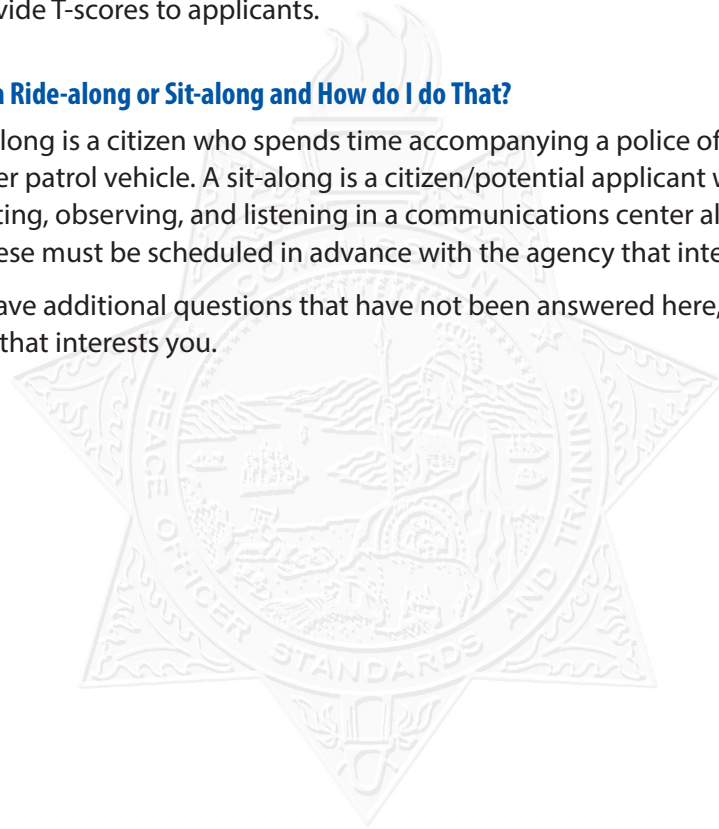
agencies, POST does not require all agencies to use the same passing score. Agencies are allowed to locally determine the passing score that best fits their hiring needs and standards. Since research shows that the likelihood of successful academy completion increases for every point above 42 an applicant scores; POST recommends that agencies select a passing score of 42 or above.

All agencies/academies using the test are required to provide a T- score breakdown that includes the individual applicant's reading, writing, and total T-scores. The score breakdown must be provided to the applicant in writing on agency/academy letterhead within 30 days of the test administration. POST does not provide T-scores to applicants.

What is a Ride-along or Sit-along and How do I do That?

A ride-along is a citizen who spends time accompanying a police officer on a shift in his/her patrol vehicle. A sit-along is a citizen/potential applicant who spends time sitting, observing, and listening in a communications center alongside a PSD. These must be scheduled in advance with the agency that interests you.

If you have additional questions that have not been answered here, contact the agency that interests you.



Appendices

1. Acronyms

APCO	Association of Public Communication Officers
BPR	Best Possible Results
CDE	Continuing Dispatch Education (IAED term)
CPT	Continued Professional Training (POST term)
CTO	Communications Training Officer
DMV	Department of Motor Vehicles
DOJ	Department of Justice
EMD	Emergency Medical Dispatcher
ENP	Emergency Number Professional
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
IAED	International Academy of Emergency Dispatch
IDI	Instructor Development Institute
JPA	Joint Powers Agreement
LD	Learning Domain
NAED	National Academy of Emergency Dispatch
NENA	National Emergency Number Association
PAM	POST Administrative Manual
POST	Peace Officer Standards in Training
PSD	Public Safety Dispatcher
RPL	Registered Public-Safety Leader

2. The International Academies of Emergency Dispatch

Code of Ethics

1. Academy-certified dispatchers should endeavor to put the needs of the public above their own.
2. Academy-certified dispatchers should continually seek to maintain and improve their professional knowledge, skills, and competence and should seek continuing education whenever available.
3. Academy-certified dispatchers should obey all laws and regulations and should avoid any conduct or activity, which would cause unjust harm to the citizens they serve.
4. Academy-certified dispatchers should be diligent and caring in the performance of their occupational duties.
5. Academy-certified dispatchers should establish and maintain honorable relationships with their public service peers and with all those who rely on their professional skill and judgment.
6. Academy-certified dispatchers should assist in improving the public understanding of emergency dispatch.
7. Academy-certified dispatchers should assist in the operation of and enhance the performance of their dispatch systems.
8. Academy-certified dispatchers should seek to maintain the highest standard of personal practice and also maintain the integrity of the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch by exemplifying this professional Code of Ethics.

Code of Conduct

1. Academy-certified personnel shall not participate in, or publicly endorse, any group or organization that demeans the goals, objectives, credibility, reputation, goodwill, or dignity of the Academy or the public safety profession.
2. Academy-certified personnel shall be truthful and timely in all forms of communication with the Academy and shall not provide information that is false, misleading, and deceptive or that creates unreasonable expectations. Academy-certified personnel shall not sign any document that the individual knows or should know contains false or misleading information.
3. Academy-certified personnel shall notify the Academy of any and all occurrences that could call into question one's ability to perform his or her duty as a dispatcher. Academy-certified personnel must notify the Academy immediately if convicted of a felony or crime involving moral turpitude. Crimes of moral turpitude include, but are not limited to, illegal pornography, fraud, embezzlement, illicit drug abuse or distribution, theft, bribery, kidnapping, or assault.

4. Academy-certified personnel are prohibited from using Academy certification(s) for private or commercial gain. Academy-certified personnel shall not compete in any way with the Academy or its contracted partners, including Priority Dispatch®, in regards to active or planned business activities without prior written authorization.
5. Academy-certified personnel shall not violate patient privacy laws and rights and shall always respect those rights.
6. Academy-certified personnel shall not take calls or dispatch while under the influence of alcohol, illicit drugs, or any other agent that would impair one's ability to properly function in the dispatch setting.
7. Academy-certified personnel shall not engage in conduct or perform an act that would reasonably be regarded as disgraceful, dishonorable, or unprofessional.
8. Academy-certified personnel should avoid practicing or facilitating discrimination and strive to prevent discriminatory practices including, but not limited to, those relating to race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, or disability.
9. Academy-certified personnel understand it is their personal responsibility to ensure they remain certified by the Academy through CDE and similar Academy-approved programs and processes. Academy-certified personnel shall follow their respective employer's policies and procedures. In addition, they shall strive to always follow the Academy's protocol, including key questioning, determinant coding, Post-Dispatch Instructions, critical ED information, and Pre-Arrival Instructions.
10. Finally, Academy-certified personnel understand it is their responsibility to remain current on any and all protocol changes that can have an impact on the outcome, negative or positive, of the emergency for which the dispatcher is responsible.

3. The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Public Safety Telecommunicator's Code of Ethics

As a Public Safety Telecommunicator, I am dedicated to serve the public; to safeguard life and property; to keep my personnel informed on all calls that may require their attention; to assist all public safety vehicles and personnel in the performance of their duties; assure that all rules and regulations which govern my position are not violated in any manner.

I will keep my private and social life free from all criticism; maintain a calm attitude during times of stress and emergencies; develop self-control and be constantly mindful of the welfare of others, regardless of race, creed, or religion. I will obey the laws of the land, rules, and regulations of the Federal Communications Commission and my department. Whatever information I receive of a confidential nature will be revealed only in the official performance of my duties.

I will never act in a selfish or unofficial manner or let my personal feelings, friendships, prejudices or animosity influence my decisions. I will enforce the rules and regulations of my department and the Federal Communications Commission without fear, favor or ill will, never employing unnecessary force and never accepting gratuities.

I recognize the high responsibility of my position as a symbol of public faith and trust and will accept it to be held as long as I am faithful to the ethics of public safety service. I will constantly strive to achieve those objectives and ideals, which govern my profession, dedicating myself, before God, to my chosen profession, public safety telecommunications.

Author: Evert E. Carter, Chief Dispatcher
Williamson County Sheriff's Department
Marion, Illinois 1981

4. Mission Statements

Riverside County Sheriff Communications Bureau Mission Statement

"As members of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department Communications Centers, we commit ourselves to perform and display integrity, loyalty, professionalism and leadership. We dedicate ourselves to achieve and provide superior service to the citizens of Riverside County and all department personnel. We also dedicate ourselves to uphold a high level of credibility, efficiency, job performance, and employee satisfaction within our communication centers."

Ontario Police Department Mission Statement

"The mission of the Ontario Police Department is to protect life and property, solve neighborhood problems, and enhance the quality of life in our community. We do this by providing superior police services while fostering successful community partnerships.

Pride: Realizing law enforcement to be among the most-noble professions in the world and deriving personal and professional satisfaction from the effective performance of our duties.

Professionalism: It is not the job we do, it is how we do the job. Be engaging, considerate and resourceful in actions, image and conduct.

Integrity: It takes less effort to do right than it does to explain why we did wrong. The reputation of a hundred years can be undermined by the conduct of one.

Teamwork: Fulfilling relationships that instill pride, passion and commitment through communication and performance. Learn from the past and embrace the future through empowerment, respect and cooperation while seeking excellence."

Communications Center Mission Statement

"Dispatch will be at the forefront of the City's drive for Customer Service."

Our Core Values

"Be COMMITTED to the Public Safety Profession, Customer Service and the Department.

Be a POSITIVE member to create an enjoyable environment in a united team. ACT without being asked. If you see a need, act on it!

Hold yourself ACCOUNTABLE before holding others accountable.

Be an INSPIRATION by sharing knowledge and experience, explaining actions and remaining open to continued learning and understanding new concepts."

Shasta Area Safety Communications Agency Mission Statement

"Communications is an essential and integral partner in achieving citizen and officer safety. Citizens and user agency personnel are called upon to unquestionably place their faith, trust, and often, their lives in our ability. Our every action while on duty, whether we are on the radio, on the telephone, other communications devices or in personal interaction must project a well-trained, professional demeanor. Every employee must be worthy of the public trust."

Santa Cruz Regional 911 Mission Statement

"Santa Cruz Regional 911 is dedicated to serving as the vital link between the public and public safety organizations through responsiveness and technical excellence while in partnership with its Users and employees."

Chino Police Department

"We the members of the Chino Police Department are dedicated to the safety of our community; through teamwork and problem solving partnerships, providing excellent service with dignity and respect."



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