

POLICE RADIO DISPATCHER



**Informational Booklet
Summer 2007**



Combined Communications Building (CCB). This building houses 911, the Spokane Crime Reporting Center, and separate dispatch services for Police, Sheriff, and Fire.

Introduction

Imagine a regular day as a dispatcher with the Spokane Police Department. Your shift starts at 1800 (6pm) ; you come in 5-10 minutes early in order to get a briefing from the off-going dispatcher of the channel you're taking responsibility for. An armed robbery occurred earlier in the day, and you're given descriptions of the suspect and the suspect's vehicle. You're currently working 5 active calls: a domestic dispute, and 2 traffic stops where officers are on scene, a burglary report that one officer is en route to, and a suspicious person call where one officer is on scene and her backup is en route. You have 3 calls that have not yet been dispatched due to lack of available units.

During the course of your shift, an officer asks you for the description of the vehicle used in the armed robbery. As it turns out, the officer is behind a vehicle matching that description. A vehicle pursuit ensues; your training kicks in and you make sure the officer relays all necessary information over the radio, while at the same time, ensuring appropriate backup is en route. The driver exits the vehicle, and runs off on foot; you refer to your map to help the officer set up containment, and eventually, the person is caught. Meanwhile, other calls for service are coming in from 911, and you are prioritizing them and advising the dispatcher for the other tactical channel which calls need to be dispatched while your channel is restricted for the chase.

Later, you take a transfer phone call from 911. You're talking to a man who wants to commit suicide. You're counseling him while at the same time getting information that will allow the officers to safely contact him and get him the help he needs.

While all this is going on, the phones keep ringing, the calls for service keep coming in, and officers are making self-initiated contacts of suspicious persons. You're providing backup for the officers, as well as checking license plates and warrants checks, and requesting paramedics, tow trucks and other phone calls to assist the officers.

Do you consider yourself an adrenaline or stress junkie, or maybe a type-A personality? Does the idea of working in law enforcement appeal to you? It takes a special person to meet the demands of public safety communications. They often have to do several things at once, sometimes during life-threatening situations. A slow or improper response to a call can result in serious injury or further harm. The job requires maintaining composure, and keeping emotions in check, even in very difficult and emotionally charged situations. Being involved in these kind of situations can affect a dispatcher physically and emotionally.

Dispatcher Traits and Skills

In fact, the most critical trait for a successful dispatcher to have is *tolerance of stress*. This trait was identified by a dispatcher job analysis by the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) in 1991. They defined this trait as being able to:

- Perform effectively under adverse conditions (e.g., working under time pressure with high visibility and serious consequence of error, in crisis situations, tragedies, and emergencies, handle simultaneous incidents, and working with frequent interruption)
- 'Bounce back' from negative situations
- Perform duties under extreme pressure without delay

A total of 14 traits were rated by dispatch supervisors as being necessary to have before even being hired. Tolerance of Stress was first, followed by *Integrity*.

As Police Department employees, dispatchers must conduct themselves ethically and morally on and off duty. All of a dispatcher's computer, radio and phone activities are recorded and are subject to subpoena. It is imperative for Communications Division personnel to maintain confidentiality of data and sensitive situations they encounter during their workday.



Dependability and *Emotional Control* were also rated high in importance. They were followed by: Tolerance of Unpleasant Work Environment, Adaptability, Teamwork, Maturity, Productivity, Positive Attitude, Assertiveness, Social Concern, Motivation, and Interpersonal Sensitivity.

The POST study listed five skills as being most important to have because they applied most frequently to different aspects of dispatching. Two of them are:

- Listening while at the same time performing various tasks
- Talking while at the same time operating dispatching equipment.



A typical SPD Dispatch Console includes 4 computer screens, 2 computer keyboards, 3 computer mice, a multi-line phone system, 4 radio speakers, 2 digital playback recorders, 2 headset jacks, and a foot pedal to transmit on the radio. The consoles raise and lower to accommodate a sitting or standing work preference. Some consoles also have TDD equipment.

Our training program refers to these two skills as *multitasking*. For example, when an officer requests a person's name be checked for wants and warrants, a SPD dispatcher depresses a radio transmit foot pedal, retrieves a computer screen to initiate a name check, enters the officer's unit number in a specific field on the screen, and moves the cursor to the 'last name' field of the screen, while replying "go ahead", then releasing the pedal. All of this activity takes place in the time it takes you to say, "go ahead". If you're one of those people who can seamlessly talk on the cell phone while surfing the Internet and doing homework, you might be a good fit for our group.

The remaining important skills from the POST study were:

- maintaining vocal composure under adverse or stressful conditions
- reading and understanding policy and procedure manuals and memoranda
- projecting one's voice clearly and audibly, with appropriate tone, phrasing, diction, and rate of speed.

Dispatcher Workload

The previous paragraphs give you an idea of what we expect you to be able to do. How often do we expect you to do it?

In 2007, the Matrix consulting group completed a study of the organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and turnaround for all departments in the City of Spokane.

According to the study, in 2005, Spokane Police Dispatch handled:

64,037 calls for service from the public

31,000 attempt to locate calls

75,000 officer-initiated contacts

The Spokane Police Department Planning unit says that Dispatch actually handled 195,798 calls in 2005. That's 25,761 calls in addition to those listed in the Matrix group's study.

The study projected a 3% increase from 2005. This means our unit is projected to handle approximately 23 incidents an hour in 2007. The study also assumes average time of dispatch work per call of 6.73 minutes, once the call has been forwarded to dispatch. That's 155 minutes of work an hour, spread across two tactical channels. You can probably start to see why our work requires multitasking skills and an ability to tolerate stress.

Staffing and Shiftwork

In addition to our two main channels, we have a third channel that is staffed during the busier hours in order to process non-tactical officer requests. We also have a fourth dispatcher position to assist with phone requests as scheduling allows for it. Rounding out our staff is the supervisor, who coordinates our activities and absorbs most of the phone requests. Our unit has 18 dispatchers and 5 supervisors when we're fully staffed.

Currently, we work four 10-hour shifts and 3 days off. Day Shift is from 0800 (8am) to 1800 (6pm), and Night Shift is from 1800 to 0400 (4am). In order to cover the remaining hours, Day Shift staffs 0600 to 0800 with mandatory overtime, and Night Shift does the same from 0400 to 0600. The first day off is "on-call"; the dispatcher who is on-call has to be available to respond to the dispatch center in the event of an emergency or staff shortage.

Shifts and days off are bid every six months. The process starts with the most senior dispatcher, and continues, in order, to the least senior member of our team. Dispatchers must be willing to work any shift assigned them. Communications personnel are expected to work all holidays, unless they fall on regular days off.

Pay and Career Progression

As of September 2006, the starting rate of pay for a Police Radio Dispatcher I is \$14.70 per hour. Dispatcher II (Lateral) starts at \$19.44 per hour. Each pay grade has four pay levels.

After two years, Dispatcher I and II employees are eligible to test for promotion to Dispatcher III. The first pay level for Dispatcher III is \$19.20 per hour. Promotions will always result in an increase in pay. For this reason, laterals that promote will, at the least, start at the second pay level, which is \$21.34/hour.

A Dispatcher III is eligible to test for Police Communications Supervisor after two years. \$21.50/hour is the starting rate of pay.

A Spokane Police Lieutenant manages our unit. This may be changing to a civilian position in the future, for another career advancement opportunity.

Benefits

The City of Spokane offers an excellent benefits package, which includes:

- Paid vacation and sick leave
- Shift differential pay
- Medical, Dental and Vision insurance
- Retirement program
- Deferred Compensation, with up \$120/month City match
- Section 125 care accounts
- Employee Assistance Program
- Employee and dependent life insurance; city pays in full
- Voluntary long term care and additional life insurance plans
- Retiree medical insurance
- 7 paid holidays and 4 floating holidays
- Tuition reimbursement program
- Wellness program, including gym membership



The City of Spokane is home to some 195,500 residents; there are around 418,000 residents in the metropolitan area. Spokane is located in the heart of the Inland Northwest, and it serves as a shopping, entertainment, and medical hub for an area that includes Eastern Washington, Eastern Oregon, North Idaho, Western Montana, and southern portions of Alberta and British Columbia.

Employment Information

If you've been employed within the last eighteen months as a law enforcement radio dispatcher utilizing a Computer Aided Dispatch system with at least one year of experience, you're eligible for lateral entry. If you're interested, go to <http://www.spokanecity.org/jobs/> and follow the link for Police Radio Dispatcher II – Lateral Entry.

If you're not eligible for lateral entry, the City of Spokane's Civil Service Department conducts open-entry testing. The testing is in two parts: a written exam and a computer-based skills test. Applicants will be ranked based on their written test scores. Candidates will be scheduled for the skills test based on their ranking, highest first. The skills test uses CritiCall software, and measures multitasking and keyboarding ability, among other things. A candidate that fails the CritiCall test will be removed from the list.

The candidate list from open-entry testing is kept for two years, or until the list is exhausted, whichever comes first. When the list expires, the Civil Service Department will post a job announcement prior to giving a new open-entry test. The minimum education requirement is High School diploma or equivalent. Current job listings for the City of Spokane are at: <http://www.spokanecity.org/jobs/>

The City of Spokane's Civil Service Office is in the 4th floor of City Hall, 808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd. Their phone number is (509) 625-6160. The City of Spokane has a 24-hour job information line at (509)-625-6161.

As vacancies occur, persons ranked highest on the open-entry and lateral lists will be scheduled for a 4-hour "sit-along" in our facility. We schedule an informal meeting for the open-entry group after all their "sit-alongs" are done. After that, eligible candidates will be scheduled for an oral board interview. Open-entry candidates must complete a suitability self-assessment questionnaire and bring it with them to the oral board interview. The self-assessment is provided at the end of this booklet.

A successful candidate must successfully complete a thorough background investigation, polygraph examination, and a psychological exam. Remaining candidates will be scheduled for a meeting with Chief Kirkpatrick, after which a conditional offer of employment will be given. Candidates must then pass a medical physical that will be scheduled soon after meeting with the Chief.

Training

Our training program is modeled after the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Communications Training Officer (CTO) program.

The dispatch trainee will receive approximately 6 weeks of classroom-type training. The training includes use of local, state and national law enforcement computer systems, along with our Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Arterials, address numbering system, and other aspects of City of Spokane geography are also covered during this time. The trainee will be expected to pass a written test prior to continuing in training. This period is augmented with 3-4 additional weeks of ride-alongs with Patrol and in the dispatch center.

Trainees also go through three 6-8 week phases of on the job (OJT) training. She or he is assigned to different CTOs during OJT. The trainee's responsibilities increase with each phase of training. The trainee's performance is evaluated daily during the OJT period, with an emphasis on officer safety. Those reports are used to determine whether to pass the trainee on to successive levels of training. Upon successful completion of the training phases, the dispatcher is 'soloed' for the remainder of the 1.5-year probationary period.



Those people that become police dispatchers enjoy being 'part of the action'. We know the news before "this just in..." comes in. We not only help protect the citizens, we also help keep our officers safe. Each day is a like new puzzle to solve, and we're constantly learning new ways to improve our skills. And besides, where else can you get away with telling a police officer where to go?

If this sounds like the career for you, we'd love to have you on our team. A career as a police dispatcher can be rewarding and exciting. It can also be stressful and difficult. Both of these statements are true; that's one of the reasons that becoming a police dispatcher can be one of the hardest things you'll ever learn to do. If you are able to master the skills necessary for this job, you'll find that it is an excellent way to serve your community while earning a pretty good living.

Online Resources

Here are some other links to help you assess your suitability for this position. These links are provided for your convenience and do not constitute an endorsement:

[9-1-1 Magazine](#)

[APCO – Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials](#)

[The Break Room - personal webpage of a CHP dispatcher](#)

[Criticall](#)

[Dispatch Monthly Magazine - Resources for Public Safety Dispatcher Applicants](#)

[Dispatch Monthly Magazine - Average Dispatch Trainee Retention Chart](#)

[DualTask.org – U of CA, San Diego multitasking site – try Visible Bottleneck I](#)

[Stress and the Emergency Dispatcher – online .pdf book](#)

[US Dept of Labor Occupational Outlook Handbook - Dispatchers](#)

Training Manual Examples

The following information is presented for information only. These examples are excerpts from our training manual. They are presented to give you a better idea of what is expected from a dispatcher for our agency. This information is not on any of our pre-employment testing.

Phonetic Alphabet - Our agency uses the Police Phonetic Alphabet in order to distinctly spell out names and alpha characters that could be easily misinterpreted over the radio. It is imperative that you learn to use this system properly to avoid confusion between field units and radio.

Police Phonetic Alphabet:

<i>Adam</i>	<i>Henry</i>	<i>Ocean</i>	<i>Victor</i>
<i>Boy</i>	<i>Ida</i>	<i>Paul</i>	<i>William</i>
<i>Charlie</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Queen</i>	<i>X-Ray</i>
<i>David</i>	<i>King</i>	<i>Robert</i>	<i>Young</i>
<i>Edward</i>	<i>Lincoln</i>	<i>Sam</i>	<i>Zebra</i>
<i>Frank</i>	<i>Mary</i>	<i>Tom</i>	
<i>George</i>	<i>Nora</i>	<i>Union</i>	

To properly use the phonetic alphabet when giving name information, first state the name (if possible), then give the phonetic alphabet word for each letter in groups of three. For example: "Smythe; sam mary young, tom henry edward".

When giving full names, give last name first, then first name, followed by middle initial, identifying each name as you go. For example: "last of Jones; john ocean nora, edward sam, first of Nicholas; nora ida charles, henry ocean lincoln, adam sam, middle G george".

Twenty-four hour time - The Spokane Police Department uses twenty-four hour, or military time when identifying the time for an activity. Twenty-four hour time starts at midnight, or *0000 hours*, and is counted continuously through until midnight the next day. For afternoon and evening times, one hour for each passing hour after noon, or *1200 hours*, is added to 1200. In this way, 1 p.m. is *1300* and 7 p.m. is *1900*. Minutes are counted consecutively for each hour; 45 minutes past 5 p.m. or quarter to 5 p.m. is *1745* (you wouldn't say "quarter to 1800").

The clocks on our CAD terminals and the Motorola console are in twenty-four hour time in order to assist you in using twenty-four hour times. Practice "thinking" in twenty-four hour time so that you are comfortable with it. As with other dispatch tools and techniques, this should be as second nature as possible so that it isn't a hindrance to effective dispatching. Here is a listing of various twenty-four hour times:

24-hour time

0000 (zero hundred)
0015 (zero zero fifteen)
0200 (zero two hundred)
1000 (ten hundred)
1200
1201 (twelve zero [or "oh"] one)
1300 (thirteen hundred)
1345 (thirteen forty-five)
2359 (twenty-three fifty-nine)

12-hour time

beginning of day/midnight
quarter past midnight
2 a.m.
10 a.m.
Noon
1 minute after noon
1 p.m.
1:45 p.m. or quarter to 2
11:59 p.m.

Geography: Introduction - Why learn geography? Knowledge of city geography is one of the best resources a dispatcher can have at his/her disposal. It serves as an aid in all levels of dispatch from basic to advanced, most importantly in the area of citizen and officer safety.

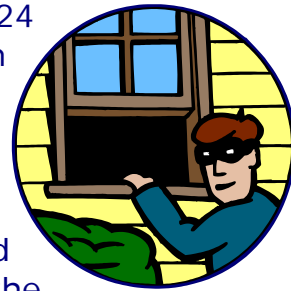
Dispatching backing units based on their proximity to the call is a good citizen and officer safety technique. Units responding should advise the location they're responding from; the dispatcher often has to think on his/her feet to determine which units to continue, and which to "disregard" the assignment.

The usefulness of geography to the dispatcher can't really be stressed enough. Not only will it aid in dispatcher's confidence in her/him self, but also the field units' confidence in their dispatcher

Geography: Numbering System - Division Street, running north and south, divides the city east and west. Sprague Avenue, running east and west, divides north from south. City blocks are numbered by 100's. A location addressed 1035 west is on the other side of the street that is 10 blocks west of Division.

Addresses are odd or even based on their orientation to Division or Sprague. Imagine your back to either Division or Sprague; the odd numbers will be on your left, and the even on your right. For example, 25 E. Lincoln Rd is located on the north side of Lincoln Rd. (facing east from Division, odd number on your left, in this case, north)

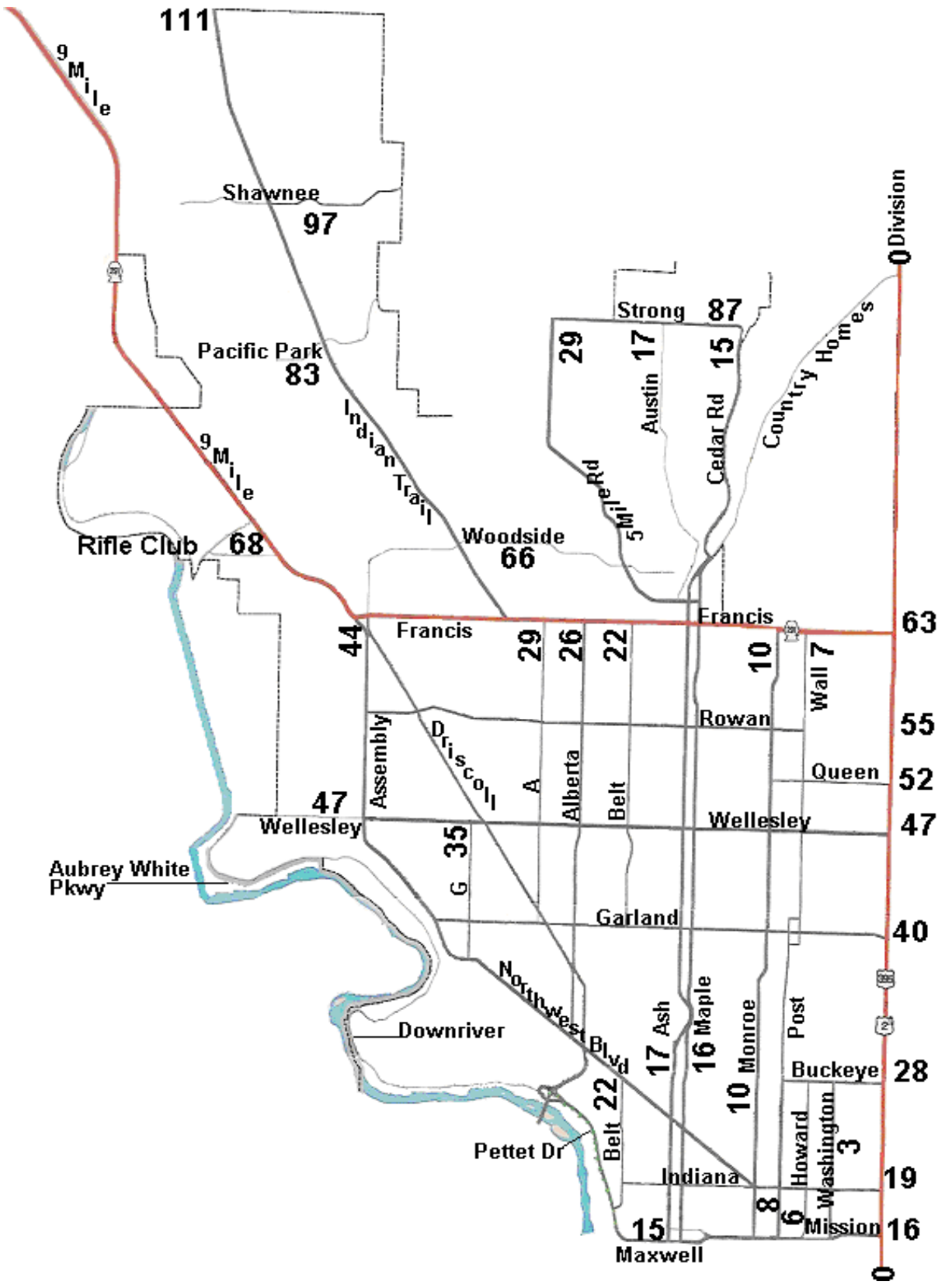
Suppose you have a burglary-in-progress call at 2124 W. Garland, and the suspect is running "away" from the back of the house. Will the officer to the north intercept the burglar, or will it be the officer to the south of the house? Imagine your back to Division, facing west; the even numbers will be on your right – to the north. The house at 2124 W. Garland faces the south; therefore, the suspect exited the north side of the house.



Geography: Coordinate system – Our coordinate system for finding a location is based on 100-block numbering. For example, Monroe Street is 10 blocks west of Division; it is referred to as 10W ("ten west"). The coordinates for 1818 N. Monroe would be 18N, 10W, meaning the address is 18 blocks north of Sprague and 10 blocks west of Division.

When responding to an in-progress call, officers may ask for the coordinates to an unfamiliar address. While this is not the same as complete directions, it does point the officer in the right direction quickly. Having this information at the ready allows you to focus on more important aspects of the situation.

You'll be expected to memorize coordinates for the arterials in the City of Spokane by the end of the Classroom Phase. The map on the next page lists the coordinates and street names for the northwest quadrant of the City of Spokane.



SPOKANE POLICE DISPATCH SUITABILITY ASSESSMENT

Name _____ Date _____

As a prospective Police Dispatcher for Spokane Police Department, you need to be aware of the aspects of the job. Experience has shown that many applicants consider only the positive aspects of the job while ignoring some of its less attractive features. As a result, when new employees encounter negative job features, they sometimes react by leaving the job before training is completed or after only a few months on the job.

Please review the following list of requirements for the position carefully, both the items you might consider to be positives, as well as those that are possibly negatives. Be absolutely certain that you are willing and able to comply with these requirements. Please bring completed form with you to your interview. You will be asked to sign this form to verify you have read and understand all statements and that you acknowledge you can meet and/or accept these conditions of employment.

PLEASE PLACE A CHECKMARK IN THE BOX IF YOU ARE WILLING TO PERFORM THIS DUTY OR WORK IN THIS TYPE OF ENVIRONMENT.

- You must be able to accurately touch-type and input data into the computer system while speaking with callers who are under stress. Suggested keyboarding speed is 40 wpm.
- You must be able to speak and write English clearly.
- You must be able to think clearly and act quickly in emergencies, organizing incoming information from many sources.
- You must be able to work in a dimly lit environment where you are required to read and discern visual images on a variety of media such as small liquid crystal displays offering very little brightness/darkness contrast, and multi-colored indicator lights with different flash rates/colors.
- You must be able to work for hours at a time continually wearing a communications headset that will cover one ear or fit within the ear canal of one ear, and be able to still hear and understand other outside sound sources.
- You must be able to work where all conversation and work is continuously recorded and is subject to ongoing reviews and critiques. It is also subject to subpoena.

- [] You will be required to work weekends and holidays. You will be required to work changing schedules, rotating shifts, and have rotating days off.
- [] Because of the nature of the work and the Center's requirement to have minimum staffing at all times, you may not be able to take short-notice personal time off.
- [] You must be able to remain seated for hours at a time during a 10 or more hour shift.
- [] You will be interrupted from your meals or breaks or be unable to take them at times.
- [] On occasion, you will have to work on your day off, work extended or adjusted shifts, be expected to sign up for overtime or be mandated in to work in emergency staffing situations.
- [] Your normal social activities and educational opportunities may be limited because of shift schedules used in a 24 hour per day operation.
- [] You will spend some of your on-duty time waiting for emergency calls. You may be required to use that "down time" to review training material or participate in Center projects.
- [] You will be under the critical eye of the public who does not always understand or appreciate what you do, and may have to deal with abusive individuals by telephone without letting that affect your judgment or attitude.
- [] During the time you are actually in the radio room working, you will be unable to work on personal projects or handle personal problems or phone calls not associated with your job assignment. Items of a personal nature must be accomplished during your break periods.
- [] You will have to report to work on time, in any kind of weather condition. Therefore, you must have reliable transportation to work.
- [] You may be exposed to profanity or lifestyles which are not acceptable in your judgment, yet you must remain calm and professional, obtaining necessary information and sending appropriate assistance.
- [] You could experience a feeling of "helplessness" at some emergency situations due to the fact that you cannot physically help the caller. The caller may indicate he or she is in distress and the call may be disconnected. You may never know the final outcome of a call you helped with.

- [] You will not be able to leave the Center to help your family or friends during disasters such as floods, earthquakes, windstorms, volcanic eruptions, etc.
- [] You will be working in a restricted, secured law enforcement environment which where visits from family members and friends will not be possible without special arrangements.
- [] You will not be able to connect with the caller "face to face" to get additional information and read "body language". All information will be from telephone calls.
- [] You will be required to work as a part of a team and play a small but vital part in the outcome of the response. Ordinarily you won't be involved in on-going projects or long-term planning except during slow times. Your primary job duties will be quick responses to the incident at hand, which is then delegated to a law/fire/aid responder to complete.
- [] You will be expected to adhere to stringent rules and regulations and follow established protocols and procedures.
- [] You must be willing to agree that the integrity of the information in the Communications Center is vital and that any breach of confidentiality may result in disciplinary action or dismissal.

Please take a moment to review these requirements. Think about past jobs you have had, and the part you played in the team. Think about what you liked and didn't like in all of your previous jobs and/or volunteer positions. If you feel you can comply with the requirements listed above, a police dispatch position could be a suitable occupation for you.

If some of the requirements do not suit you, or you question your ability to comply with the requirements listed, this means that dispatch work might not be suitable for you. Any negative concerns will be magnified once you are "on the floor" as a dispatcher. If you answered "no" to the majority of the questions, then the position probably isn't suitable for you. We cannot train you to handle a work environment that isn't natural or comfortable for you.

If you feel that your temperament, personality, and work style preferences are similar to those indicated on this assessment, then please continue with the application process. You will be asked to sign this acknowledgement at your interview.

Applicant Acknowledgement:

I have reviewed the suitability Assessment openly, honestly, and to the best of my ability and agree with the requirements.

Signature: _____ Date: _____