



LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION (LEAA)
POLICE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT

SUBJECT	Communications and Records Consolidation Study
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FOR	Montgomery County, Kansas Population: 39,000 (1975) Square Mile Area 62.8
CONTRACTOR	Public Administration Service 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036
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I. INTRODUCTION

This report was prepared in response to a technical assistance request from the chairman of the County Commissioners, Montgomery County, Kansas, for a needs assessment study and recommendations for the development of a county-wide consolidated communications and records system.

The consultant assigned was James E. Mc Corkle, Jr., P.E., and other personnel involved in the processing of the request included:

Requesting Agency:	Mr. Raymond Caldwell, Jr. Commissioner, Montgomery County Independence, Kansas
State Planning Agencies:	Mr. Ron Gustafson Criminal Justice Planner Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission Mr. Larry W. Cheatham Governor's Committee on Criminal Administration Topeka, Kansas
Approving Agency:	Mr. Robert O. Heck Police Specialist LEAA Office of Regional Operations

The Montgomery County Commissioners are presently contemplating the construction of a building to house the county jail, Sheriff's Office, and the City of Independence Police Department, and that will include a center for the consolidation of the many law enforcement communications and records systems in the county. The on-site visit on January 9-13, 1978, involved a technical evaluation of the communications systems, an analysis of the effectiveness of the systems to meet the requirements of the law enforcement programs, a determination of the effectiveness of the active record filing and retrieval system, and an analysis of the operating procedures of the communication personnel. Past correspondence and studies were reviewed, and future plans for expansion were identified.

Personnel contacted were:

Mr. Ron Gustafson Criminal Justice Planner Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission
Mr. George Wheeler Crime Prevention Specialist Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission

Mr. Raymond Caldwell, Jr.
Commissioner and Chairman
Montgomery County Commissioners

Mr. C. R. Vandergrift
Commissioner
Montgomery County

Mr. Paul Oakleaf
County Attorney
Montgomery County

Mr. Richard Jarvis
Montgomery County Roads Supervisor and
County Civil Defense Director

Mr. Terry Brown
Montgomery County Assessor

Mr. Arthur Schenk
Montgomery County Sheriff

Mr. Paul A. Sasse
Mayor
Independence, Kansas

Mr. Stan Lewis
Chief of Police
Independence, Kansas

Mr. Jerry Smith
Chief of Police
Coffeyville, Kansas

Mr. Ray Metcalf
Chief of Police
Caney, Kansas

Mr. Ron Curran
Chief of Police
Cherryvale, Kansas

II. ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

The on-site visit in Independence, Kansas, included a meeting with George Wheeler, Regional Planning Commission; C. R. Vandergrift, Commissioner; and Richard Jarvis, County Roads Supervisor and Civil Defense Director. The discussion revolved around the County Commissioners' plans to have a county building constructed that will accommodate a new county jail, the Sheriff's Office, the Independence, Kansas, Police Department, and a countywide communications and records center. Also, the County Commissioners have recently authorized the purchase, installation, and programming of a Burroughs model B-800 data computer. Programming for the records maintenance of several of the county agencies was in progress during this on-site visit. It was anticipated that the computer would go on-line within a few weeks. Arrangements were made for the consultant to visit the law enforcement agencies in the cities of Independence, Coffeyville, Cherryville, and Caney, Kansas.

The County Commissioners are aware of the need within the county for an improved law enforcement communications system and recordkeeping methods. With the procurement of the computer and planning for the new law enforcement building, it appears that the preparation of a study on the feasibility of developing a countywide consolidated communication and records center, serving all law enforcement and supporting agencies in the county, is most timely.

The consultant was well received by all personnel contacted in the law enforcement agencies in the county. They also are well aware of the need for an effective communication and record system. The suggested approach to developing a countywide consolidated communication dispatch center to serve all of the law enforcement agencies in the county and provide interface with all state command and control networks, plus county public safety agencies, was acceptable to the agencies, as indicated in the discussion of findings and conclusions that follows. Independence was recommended for the center because of its central location within the county and available resources, including a computer, radio tower, and planned new building.

The development of a countywide consolidated record system for law enforcement agencies, using a computer, was equally acceptable to the agencies as a requirement for a timely and effective method for record storage, search, and retrieval. This will provide a uniformity in recordkeeping and provide reports for administrative purposes.

III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Communications

The discussions, findings, and observations at each of the law enforcement agencies visited confirmed their need to update the communications system and procedures that are adversely affecting law enforcement operations. Each of these agencies should be complimented on the ingenious means being used to make do with the personnel and equipment resources at their disposal. However, in the opinion of the consultant, these agencies and the responsible governing bodies have been fortunate that to date the lack of necessary resources has not been responsible for a major personnel catastrophe. In today's state of the communications art, the capability to maintain continuous mobile radio communication and the means for immediate availability of essential crime record data have been created first and foremost for the personal safety and most effective operation of the patrolmen on the street. Without these timely essential resources, patrolmen are vulnerable to unnecessary risks to their persons and may be restricted in the performance of their duties. The supervisory personnel directly involved are aware of these deficiencies, and this study is the result of their concern and recognition of the need for action.

The communication equipments of the public safety agencies in the county use a combination of low and high VHF radio channels. The problems with using these channels for law enforcement are the untimely interruptions caused by skip reception from neighboring states. These interruptions can completely block out a critical communication in progress, affecting the immediate and time-critical actions of the personnel involved--the patrolman on the street and the dispatcher.

For patrolmen to maintain radio communication with the law enforcement and support agencies that use the different VHF channels, through two-way or cross monitoring methods, the patrol cars carry several radios. These vehicles have as many as four radios and four outside antennas, plus a scanner receiver to alert the patrolman as to which radio is in use. The scanner was added as a means of managing the conglomerate; however, the poor reception capabilities provided by the device have resulted in their being a liability rather than an asset, as planned.

Base stations are used primarily for base-to-mobile communications. Cross-monitoring is used extensively for base-to-base communication. Cross-monitoring is an ineffective way to communicate with agencies on another channel. It ties up two channels, one for each agency. Mobiles receive only one side of the conversation unless they also have a receiver on the channel of the other agency.

The Independence Police Department communications center and the county Sheriff's Department have access to the statewide teletype network ASTRA (Automated Statewide Telecommunications and Records Access) through the county teletype terminal. This network has a terminal in each county and also provides access to the Kansas law enforcement and motor vehicle data files, Kansas Highway Patrol terminals, inquiry into National Crime Information Center files, and

selected Missouri systems. The Coffeyville Police Department communications center has a teletype terminal into the ASTRA system. Other municipalities in the county relay their data needs and get their reply through one of these two terminals. This method of data retrieval is subject to error when relayed and is too slow in responding when the patrolmen are in a critical situation and must have information immediately to evaluate the risks involved, whether an arrest is required, assistance is needed, and related actions. In these situations, time is of the essence. To request data through the teletype terminal, the dispatcher (there is one per shift) must first cut a teletype tape off-line using a fixed format, then put the tape on-line and wait for acceptance by the line polling device used on the ASTRA system. Once accepted, the transmission is slow, using 110 baud lines. The information can be quickly researched in the computer file, but the return route of the requested data is again delayed by the line polling and the 110 baud line in getting it to the teletype machine of the requester. The physical limitations of the one-dispatcher communications centers can also delay responses because of other traffic requests. The consultant observed several requests for data using the ASTRA lines that required 2 to 4 minutes to request and receive a response. By comparison, a fully automatic system can provide this service in 10 seconds or less.

The Independence Police Department communications center dispatcher is presently providing dispatch services, record checks, and intra- and inter-agency calls for other law enforcement agencies in the county, including the Sheriff's Department, during their after-duty hours, weekends, and holidays. The Sheriff's Department is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. week days, holidays excepted. The same service is provided the Caney Police Department. The Cherryville Police Department uses the dispatch services of the Independence Police Department on an irregular basis, and at busy times accesses ASTRA through the Coffeyville terminal.

B. Records

The dispatcher's records are limited to the entries on a station log. Messages transmitted and received by teletype provide a printout and are filed. Written records are manually filed and retrieved, a slow process that is subject to misfiling. The lack of continuous tape recorders with instant playback interfaced with the radio system and telephone lines of the communication center is an important discrepancy. Such recorders can provide the dispatcher with instant playback to have a verbal message repeated and eliminate a possible error. The tape is also acceptable as court evidence, provides the supervisor with a means of performance evaluation, and is a valuable dispatcher training device.

The immediate access to the records of a suspect is one of the most important support services the patrolmen must have for the success of the law enforcement program and their own safety. The difference between a hit and a miss can be the timely access to records on the suspect, vehicle, or item in the possession of the suspect.

C. Personnel

Another highly important support service to the patrolmen is the dispatcher. The municipal police departments operate with one dispatcher on each shift. When the dispatcher requires temporary relief, a person from another service takes over the control center and responds to calls. This may be the dispatcher from Independence or a department staff member. As an example, in some police departments a patrolman is called in from the street to perform this temporary relief duty. These people may or may not be qualified dispatchers, but they are not performing the highest skill for which they have been trained and are being paid to perform. And the public is losing the protective services of the patrolman for that period of time. The problem of covering all job assignments in a police department with a limited number of personnel and funds results in compromises. These compromises are tolerated until a catastrophe proves them to be impractical.

The position of communication dispatcher is one of the most important in the police department organization. Like their counterparts, the uniformed officers, they must be trained in how to respond to many kinds of emergencies. One of these responsibilities is the absolute control of the communications system. If during a multiple emergency situation or a major disaster, this communications control is not maintained, chaos can result. An example of this was an aircraft crash-landing in a field near one of the cities in the county. Rescue and recovery operations involved all of the public safety agencies. Everyone was trying to use his radio with no discipline and no centralized control, and the system became a liability instead of an asset. The lack of radio control prolonged the emergency operations and prevented emergency programs from functioning as planned.

The dispatchers in the law enforcement communications centers of the county have not had the advantages of formal professional training for the position they occupy. As a result, the communication procedures that have evolved are informal and not disaster-oriented. At this writing, the Kansas Police Academy curriculum does not include telecommunications dispatcher training. This is a serious deficiency in police personnel training.

D. Public Access

The city of Independence is the only municipality in the county using the Bell system emergency telephone number 911. This number is answered by the city's police department dispatcher. This communication center operates 24 hours a day. The dispatcher connects the caller to the agency that can respond to the emergency. County residents outside of the city of Independence use the telephone number listed in their area telephone directory for the specific public safety agency they want to respond to their emergency. This procedure can be time consuming, and the agency selected may not be the best choice. Also, the emergency may involve more than one responding agency. If a toll charge is involved, this may increase the delay time.

E. Resources

There are two resources now available to the County Commissioners that are needed in developing the consolidation of the law enforcement communications and records in the county. The County Commissioners have authorized

the purchase of a Burroughs data computer, model B-800. It is being programmed for recordkeeping, retrieval, and print-out for several county agencies and is expected to go on-line shortly. It is under the supervision of the County Assessor's Office. This office has asked the Burroughs representative in Wichita, Kansas, to determine what peripheral equipment is needed to adapt the computer to the recordkeeping needs of the county and municipal law enforcement agencies.

The Montgomery County office of the Kansas Gas and Electric Company owns a 325-foot guyed radio tower in Independence, Kansas, complete with an equipment building at the base supplied with primary and alternate sources of electrical power. This company is converting its radio communications system to microwave and has no further use for this tower. Two years ago the tower was inspected by the company, given needed repairs, and painted. The agency has offered the tower to the County Commissioners. Financial arrangements, if any, have not yet been discussed.

There is a third resource still in the planning stage that will be an asset to the development of a consolidated communications and record center--the construction of a new building is contemplated for Independence that will house the county jail, Sheriff's Department, Independence Police Department, consolidated records center, and consolidated communications center. The motivating force is to have a new county jail that will meet state and Federal regulations.

F. Funding

System costs are initially in two general groups, one-time and recurring. One-time costs include equipment and installation. Recurring costs include personnel, maintenance, and leased telephone line services.

The equipment costs are estimated when the engineering design is developed. Also, from the engineering design, operational and personnel requirements are established and estimated. Without benefit of the above data for the communications system and computer configuration, the one-time costs could be \$250,000 for the basic system.

G. Cost Sharing

The recurring costs of the countywide consolidated communications and records center for personnel, maintenance, and telephone line costs that are common to all municipalities in the county served by the system can be shared by these municipalities. There are several options for dividing the costs including population size, mill levy, usage, etc. One-time costs that are applicable to the requirements of the individual municipality for entry into the system, including base terminals and mobile communication equipments, as well as the recurring costs for leased telephone lines, are usually the responsibility of that municipality.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

General Recommendations

It is recommended that the Montgomery County Commissioners establish a consolidated communications center in Independence, Kansas, to serve all of the municipal and county law enforcement agencies in the county. The many services this center could provide include countywide access to the center by using the national emergency telephone number 911 to request emergency service. This center could provide the law enforcement agencies in the county with a full-time dispatching service operated by professionally trained dispatchers, and with an immediate interface with the agencies supporting the law enforcement activities of these agencies within the county, adjoining counties, state, adjoining states, and the Federal Government. All of the law enforcement agencies in the county would have the same professional-quality emergency communications capability and service.

It is also recommended that the Montgomery County Commissioners establish a computer-operated consolidated records center in Independence, Kansas, that will accommodate the record storage, retrieval, intra- and inter- agency search and printout requirements of the municipal and county law enforcement agencies in Montgomery County. This center can provide a standard for record format and filing procedures and an immediate access to the records by video screen or printout.

Specific Recommendations

A. Consolidated Communications Center

The recommendation to establish the consolidated communications center in Independence is based on the practicality and economics of having the radio communication station near the center of the county, thus providing the greatest coverage of the county with a minimum of communication equipments.

The Montgomery County Commissioners are about to acquire the necessary tower in the required location, height, and housing for the communication equipments, plus normal and emergency electrical power. The present owners were able to successfully communicate with all areas of the county on the VHF channels. The housing is of metal and located at the base of the tower. To meet the system requirements for emergency electrical power, the facility has electrical power feeders from two sources; should one source fail, circuits are instantly switched to the alternate source. This method of providing emergency electrical power at the tower site has been in use for the past 16 years with no outage longer than the second required for the change-over switch to operate.

B. The Radio Communication System

It is recommended that the present mobile and base radio system used by the law enforcement agencies in the county be changed from the present VHF channels to UHF channels. This will eliminate the interference that is

characteristic of operation in the VHF channels. The present conglomerate of mobile radios can be replaced with a single four-channel mobile that will provide the operator with the necessary communications capability when operating through the consolidated communications center. This center can provide interface for the mobile radios with base stations in any of the VHF and UHF channels being used by other law enforcement agencies in Kansas and through other centers to neighboring states. The base station will require 8 basic channels with an expansion capability to 12 channels. They will operate on the UHF plus require VHF channels. Instead of having every law enforcement vehicle carry communication equipment for all of the required combinations of radio channels, only the consolidated communications center need have this capability. The vehicle needs only a simple mobile-to-base and mobile-to-mobile communication capability. It is more reliable, being free of VHF skip interference, economical (one versus four pieces of equipment to keep operating), simple to operate under stress, and less costly to equip additional vehicles.

C. The Control Center

It is recommended that the base station dispatchers' control center be basically equipped for two dispatcher positions with a capability to expand to three positions. Each position requires duplicate appearances and should be equipped with state-of-the-art features that provide fast and reliable operation, including a push-button matrix for switching control, using lights, color, and names for circuit identification; selective calling; a telephone line patch panel; incoming telephone line appearances with special identification and alarm for 911 calls; foot and hand microphone switches; digital clocks; rear-lighted screen for selective area map viewing; automatic full-time multiple-channel tape recorder for the recording of all radio and telephone voice communications with time imprint and the instant playback feature; indirect panel lighting; electrical status board or electronic status display (see discussion of CAD, below), and related features that will expedite the handling of calls and enable each dispatcher to handle more calls efficiently. Public access telephone lines will have a busy signal probability of less than 0.02.

The control center is the answering center for emergency telephone calls and radio communications from any location within the county. It is the centralized switchboard for all public safety agencies in the county. It is the centralized switchboard for all public safety agencies in the county, providing the necessary interface for inter- and intra-agency communications by radio and telephone.

D. Dispatchers

For full-time operation, it is recommended that the consolidated communication center be staffed with two dispatchers for each of three shifts and leave periods.

E. Training

The key to efficient operation of the consolidated communication center is the quality of dispatch training (see Appendix A). The Kansas Police Academy curriculum does not include communication dispatcher training. In lieu thereof, it is recommended that an arrangement be made with an urban law enforcement agency that is using state-of-the-art communications facilities to provide the dispatchers with a period of on-the-job training. Dispatcher training materials for pretraining may be requested from the Association of Public Safety Communication Officers (APCO), P.O. Box 669, New Smyrna Beach, Florida 32069.

F. Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD)

It is recommended that the Montgomery County Commissioners consider providing the consolidated communications center with a computer-aided dispatch capability to minimize the number of dispatchers required to staff the center. This service can be provided using the county's computer. It will be necessary to request the computer vendor, Burroughs, to provide a study on the peripheral hardware and software needed to adapt the computer to this service. As a part of the system, the law enforcement patrol cars must be equipped with input devices to communicate with the computer. In operation, the patrolman can, by pushing buttons, send data to the computer that now go to the dispatcher, including information such as location, service status, response status to a call, etc., that requires no immediate response on the part of the dispatcher but that demands dispatcher air time to respond and record (time that may be urgently needed to respond to calls for emergency assistance). Should the dispatcher require the information, instead of calling the patrolman concerned (that uses more air time), it can be retrieved from the computer by using the terminal keyboard, and it will appear on the video screen. Thus, the computer aids the dispatcher by freeing that person to answer only calls for assistance, knowing that the status information is going into the computer and can be recalled when needed.

G. Consolidated Records Center

It is recommended that the Montgomery County computer, a Burroughs B-800, be programmed to store and provide instant retrieval of law enforcement records needed by patrolmen in the apprehension of suspects, filing charges, court appearances, and related actions. Upon request, the Burroughs sales representative can have a study prepared to determine the peripheral equipment and software needed to program the computer for these record storage functions and for retrieval functions to include the county computer file plus files available through the ASTRA network.

In operation, the law enforcement agencies in the county would use a computer terminal in each agency that consists of a mini-computer, keyboard, video screen, with or without a printer. The mini-computer processes and prepares the data for transmission to the county computer or for display on the video screen. The keyboard is used to send file data to the county computer or to cause the computer to perform preprogrammed functions such as retrieval of data or search the network files for data. The printer is used when a record copy of the data is needed.

A request to the county computer for a record search includes the county computer file and, through an interface with the ASTRA network, the files of the Kansas Highway Patrol, the National Crime Information Center, and selected Missouri state agency files. The reply appears on the terminal video screen of the requesting agency or, if desired, as a printout (if the terminal is so equipped).

The function of filing and retrieval of records in the computer requires the use of classified entry procedures by the operator. Anyone not aware of these procedures would be unable to perform either function. For added security, these classified entry procedures can be changed as required.

Master Plan Recommendations

It is recommended that the Montgomery County Commissioners develop a master plan for the development schedule and operational plan for the county-wide consolidated communications and records center for the law enforcement agencies in the county. This master plan should consider the following options:

A. The Consolidated Communications Center

The establishment and operation of the consolidated communications center is not dependent on the construction of the new building to house the facility. It can be established in the present County Court House and moved when the new facilities become available. Though not desirable, the present VHF radio system could continue to be used in the consolidated communications center located in the County Court House until the new communications system equipment becomes available.

All of the law enforcement agencies in the county have agreed with the consultant on the practicality of having a countywide centralized consolidated communications and records center. All of these agencies are now partially dependent on the Independence Police Department communications center for some type of dispatching service, except Coffeyville. It is a relatively small step to assume all dispatching services. All of the municipal law enforcement agencies in the county will gain in service and manpower by such a county action.

The procurement of the radio tower from the Kansas Gas and Electric Company will provide an improved location for the installation of the present antennas now on the County Court House and will provide better coverage until the new UHF radio system can be procured and installed.

The new UHF base station with antennas and mobile UHF radios must be installed as one package.

Plans can proceed for establishing the countywide installation of the emergency telephone number 911, with the answering service in the consolidated communications center, whether in the County Court House or the new building.

B. Dispatchers

Procurement and training of dispatchers can begin, because the agencies need this expertise now. The procurement and training of additional personnel should be phased with the need as the consolidated communications center develops.

C. Computer-Aided Dispatch

Historically, when a 911 emergency telephone system is installed, the toll-free public access increases the number of calls to the communications center responding to emergency calls. This does not mean there are more emergencies, only that more of them are being reported. This increase in workload can be partially or wholly offset by the use of computer-aided dispatch. The workload will indicate when this electronic aid is needed.

D. Consolidated Records Center

The consolidated records center service to the law enforcement agencies can start at any time and will improve on present service. The first step is developing the necessary hardware and software for this computer service. The storage and retrieval functions can then be performed by verbal relay from the law enforcement agencies in the county to the computer operator. As an alternate for storage of data, the written records can be sent to this operator for computer storage. This method is slow and only improves the standardization of data being filed; by providing a central repository, it makes them readily available to those agencies with a need to know. Management gains through a spin-off by having the computer print administrative reports on the activities of the law enforcement agencies, as represented by the storage materials.

The real gain to the patrolman on the street is to have a computer terminal in each agency that will provide immediate entry and retrieval of data for the agency operator, or, if more practical, place the computer terminal in the patrolman's vehicle for immediate request and retrieval of data. With the present polling system used by the ASTRA networks, this gain is limited to the operations within the county facilities, i. e., the high-speed terminal to the county computer, versus the present slow-speed teletype machine, high-speed baud line versus the present slow-speed baud lines, and the consolidation of records with easy access versus the present divided and manually processed filing system. Data requests for record search that go beyond the county would still be subject to delay going through the polling devices of the ASTRA network.

E. Engineering Design and Specifications

When the plans for the development and installation of the countywide consolidated communications and records center are approved, it is recommended that funds be approved to develop the engineering design phase of the communication system. This should be prepared by a consultant or engineering firm that has no affiliation with vendors of communication systems and equipments eligible to bid on the county request for proposals. This is a requirement

for eligibility for funding from some Federal agencies.

When the engineering design is approved, the equipment specifications, performance requirements, and related technical data is prepared for the request for proposals (RFP) that will be sent to eligible vendors. This is followed by a pre-bid conference, bid review, acceptance, and award. The completed installation is given a technical and performance test by the consultant or engineering firm to verify that the vendor has met or exceeded the contract specifications.

It is recommended that the Burroughs computer representative submit a proposal for the hardware and software requirements to meet the law enforcement records storage and retrieval plan of operation. The proposal should be reviewed by a computer systems engineer to assure that the proposed peripheral equipment and programming meets the requirements of the consolidated records plan.

With the installation of the county computer system, the way is open to provide Montgomery County with the most advanced and widely used method of consolidated recordkeeping for law enforcement agencies.

The Kansas Comprehensive Law Enforcement Plan - Telecommunications 1977

The preceding plan for the development of a consolidated communications and records center for law enforcement agencies in Montgomery County, Kansas, is in consonance with the Kansas State Comprehensive Law Enforcement Planning-Telecommunications 1977, numbered paragraphs as follows:

2.1.1

The public will have access to the countywide emergency telephone number 911 that will be answered by a complaint operator at the consolidated communications center in the City of Independence, Montgomery County, available on a 24-hour basis, with complaint-handling equipment.

2.1.2

The consolidated communications center is designed to provide continuous dispatching service for all law enforcement agencies in Montgomery County. The use of uniform procedures and system control minimizes the response time from complaint to dispatch.

2.1.3

The county consolidated records system provides law enforcement agencies with access to computer data system files related to law enforcement.

2.1.4

The consolidated communications center provides the means to interface all county law enforcement agencies with others in the state, and with fire, ambulance, hospitals, and other emergency resources in the county. Inter-state

communication is through the Kansas Highway Patrol regional headquarters, as required.

6.2

The consolidated communications center provides the mobile and base stations with an interface capability to all of the command and control support and inter-agency coordination channels.

The consolidated communications center provides for emergency power and security.

It provides for continuous recording of public access and radio transmissions and provides sufficient public access telephone trunk lines to ensure a busy signal probability of less than 0.02. All public access lines will employ a hunting capability.

Personnel serving as dispatchers are to receive training.

APPENDIX A - DISPATCHER TRAINING

APPENDIX A - Dispatcher Training

The responsibilities of a dispatcher operating a law enforcement communication system are more than just answering a telephone or radio call. If the public could handle their emergencies without any outside assistance and if the patrolmen on the street could maintain law and order and apprehend offenders without the benefit of record information and assistance from other patrolmen or support agencies, then there would be no need for this group of remotely located people with highly specialized training and sophisticated communications equipment standing by to assist the public and the patrolmen. However, in today's world of life-threatening crimes and disasters, the dispatcher is a member of the team that bridges the gap between the person in need and the people trained to provide immediate assistance. To the patrolmen on the street, the dispatcher is their partner in any apprehending action and shares their responsibility. They are depending on the dispatcher to be sufficiently trained in his position to understand any situation they become involved in and to react accordingly. The radio and telephone communications system that is at the disposal of the dispatcher is the link between the patrolmen and the people that are standing by to assist in the emergency. Now, a communication system is no more than a collection of electronic devices. When they are placed in a specific configuration to perform specific functions, we call it a communications system. As such, this system can provide predictable services when operated according to a predetermined procedure by the people especially trained in this procedure. Therein lies the importance of dispatcher training. A communications system is only a static resource. Only the people operating it can make it a useful resource that extends the ability to communicate in a manner no other resource can provide.

What kind of a person is a dispatcher? Obviously, it must be a person that can operate effectively under stress. What fields of training are required? The two foremost fields of training are law enforcement and communications system dispatcher, two highly specialized fields. Obviously, the law enforcement training required is not as extensive as that for the patrolmen, because the position of communications dispatcher is one of support. To be supportive, the dispatchers must understand, via the communications system and in only a few selected words, the situation of the patrolmen and the support action they are expected to provide, with no time for an explanation. The status and location of all patrolmen on duty must be known and emergency actions anticipated, so that there is no loss of time in reacting. This situation status must be accurately passed on to the relief or next shift operator when being relieved of duty. Too many times when a patrolman is injured or killed because the support by the dispatcher was not handled expeditiously, the dispatcher attempts to exonerate himself by stating that he was unaware of the entire situation and hence how could he know what was going to happen, when, in reality, he failed in his responsibility as a law enforcement dispatcher.

Of course, there are two additional resources that can fail to carry out their responsibility--the responding agency and the communications system that together with the dispatcher make up the support team. The personnel or agency

requested to respond may have failed to provide a timely response, or was not equipped or trained to provide the needed support. The communications system can also fail to provide communication where it is needed, when it is needed, and in a manner that is readily intelligible and usable. For maximum effective utilization, the communications system must be specifically designed to support the existing operational procedures of all of the agencies using the system. The best engineered communication system, however, is only as effective as the personnel using it. And the dispatcher is the pivotal point in all communications going in and out of the system. This key position in the communications system also makes the dispatcher responsible for controlling the priority use of the system. In a disaster situation when the several agencies that are responding also share a single radio channel, it is necessary that the dispatcher maintain control of the channel by individually authorizing requests to use it. Telephone calls can be controlled by providing the dispatcher with out-only lines to use when the two-way lines are jammed with incoming calls. To free incoming telephone lines from callers who will not hang up their instruments, a disconnect device can be used to free the line for other emergency calls.

Thus, it becomes imperative that the dispatchers be thoroughly trained in all operational capabilities and limitations of the communications system they are using. They need not know what goes on in the "black boxes" that make up the system, but they must know what the boxes can do operationally for the benefit of the dispatchers in discharging their responsibilities.

To the patrolmen on the street, it can be a matter of life or death. How well are your dispatchers trained?

END