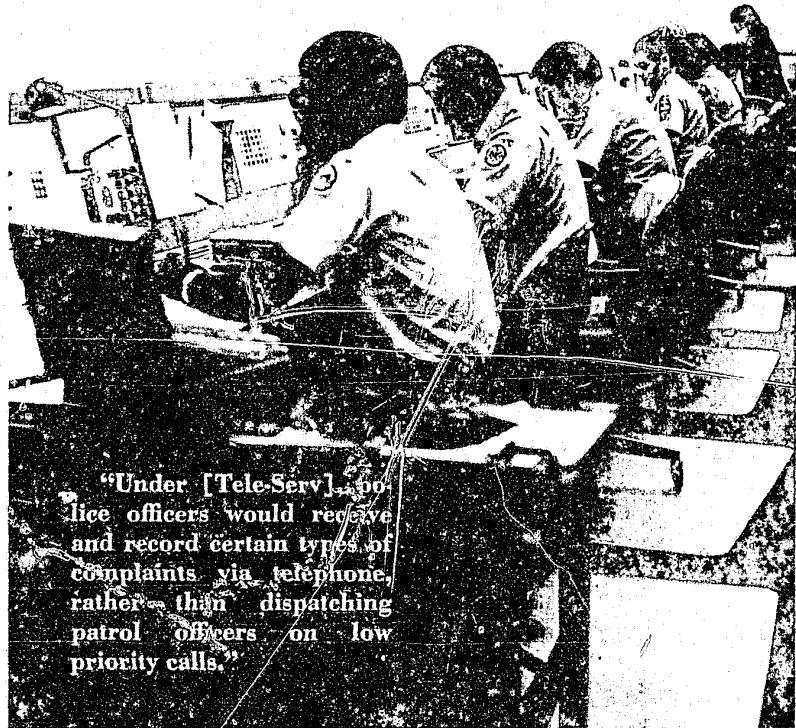


OPERATIONS

TELE-SERV



"Under [Tele-Serv], police officers would receive and record certain types of complaints via telephone, rather than dispatching patrol officers on low priority calls."

Can police managers increase services to the public at a lesser cost to the taxpayer? Most police administrators have wrestled with this question during the annual budget review. With the tax base of political subdivisions reaching the saturation point, police departments are beginning to feel the noose tighten around expenditures. While police administrators insist that they can provide better service to the public if they are provided with more personnel, local officials argue that the departments should increase the productivity of existing personnel. For the police chief, it sometimes seems like a "no-win" situation.

Fairfax County, Va., is no excep-

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tion to the "budget crunch" problem. Although the county has one of the highest per capita incomes in the Nation, competition for the tax dollar is quite vigorous. Fairfax County is located in the Washington, D.C., met-

ropolitan area, with a population of 550,000 spread over 400 square miles. The police department's service delivery area includes highly urbanized areas, bedroom communities, and rural farmland. To provide police

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service, the department has 657 sworn officers and 297 civilian personnel working from 7 district stations and an administration building.

From a historical viewpoint, the Fairfax County Police Department has attempted to engender a sound community relations atmosphere between the police and the public. When citizens requested a given service, notwithstanding its nature, police officers were normally dispatched to the citizen's home. The reasons for this policy were twofold: To create a direct contact between the officer and citizen since the rapid population expansion was causing less and less face-to-face communication; and to encourage officers to enter residential areas rather than limiting their patrols to business districts. During the 1950's and 1960's, this program served its purpose. However, with the advent of the 1970's, the budget crunch forced a critical appraisal of its utility.

Between 1940 and 1970, the population of Fairfax County increased by one-half million. Along with the population explosion, there was a dramatic increase in Part I crimes—murder, nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. As calls for service escalated, the overall response time began to deteriorate to the point that complaints of lengthy delays were affecting the department's reputation within the community. For example, during fiscal year 1974, there were 130,339 calls for police service and 15,835 traffic accidents. A total of 22,651 Part I cases were reported that year.



Major Buracker

To reduce response time and provide more time for countermeasure activities, police commanders developed several proposals to restructure the quality and quantity of police service. The major suggestions included ending escorts and bank checks, reducing traffic safety programs, using more civilians and fewer sworn personnel in the planning and research section and the communications center, clearing certain types of cases through radio code without paper, weighing criminal cases for investigative purposes, and implementing Tele-Serv—taking reports by telephone. The department has adopted all of these programs, excluding a reduction in traffic safety programs. This is a report on the development and implementation of Tele-Serv.

A critical review of the department's service delivery program disclosed an inordinate time delay when responding to critical cases. While several studies have shown that citizens may accept a lengthy response time if they are told in advance to expect it, the department still wanted to maintain a patrol force of officers

available for response to critical cases and more proactive involvement. The Tele-Serv program was viewed as a possible answer to this problem.

Under this program, police officers would receive and record certain types of complaints via telephone, rather than dispatching patrol officers on low priority calls. The overall goal—to increase the productivity of police officers in the field—had two major objectives: To reduce the caseload of patrol officers by 10 percent; and to provide additional time for patrol officers to concentrate their efforts on Part I crimes.

The greatest problem anticipated with the establishment of the Tele-Serv program was gaining acceptance by the citizens. Given a public accustomed to having a police officer at their doorstep on practically any call, the task of convincing the public that the program did not represent a service reduction was not to be taken lightly. Politically, the program would have to be sold to the county's governing body, the board of supervisors, and the county executive, the chief administrative officer.

A plan of action was developed by the chief and his staff: Establish guidelines, gain input from a representative group of personnel of all ranks, educate personnel on final proposals, present these proposals to the county administration for transmittal to the board of supervisors, appear before the board in public session, and educate the public through the media and 150 civic groups. A timetable was established for each phase.

The Tele-Serv program was initiated in August 1974. Once adopted, the procedures for implementing Tele-Serv were relatively simple. Calls for service that qualified for Tele-Serv were to be transferred from an incoming mode to one of three telephone positions staffed by police officers during the day and evening shifts.

Fairfax County has an integrated police, fire, and rescue communications center. Referred to as the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), it is staffed with 109 personnel: 27 police officers, 53 police civilians, 11 firefighters, 11 fire civilians, and 5 security guards. Pending implementation of the "911" concept (standardized emergency exchange), which is being delayed by the fact that boundaries of telephone exchanges in the northern Virginia dialing area do not match jurisdictional boundaries, the unified EOC at least makes it possible for citizens of Fairfax County to call a single number for police, fire, or emergency rescue service. One of our major objectives has been to utilize civilians mostly in the Emergency Operations Center. Thus far, civilians ("nonsworn" personnel) have been integrated into the center with a high degree of success. Our intent is to maintain police presence in the center, but at a reduced level.

When complaints or calls for service are received in the EOC, police or fire personnel may receive the call before transmittal to the affected dispatcher. When the Tele-Serv program was being planned, it was felt that the public would more readily accept the program if police officers received the calls rather than civilian or fire personnel. If Tele-Serv officers were busy with other complaints, the complainant's name, address, and telephone number were recorded on a communications card for transmittal to a Tele-Serv officer, who would return the call. The date, time of call, and nature of call were also recorded on the card for later analysis of time delays and reported case versus actual case; i.e., reported robbery but found to be a burglary.

During the initial conversation with the complainant, the Tele-Serv program was to be explained to the citizen. When told that an officer could receive certain types of reported

offenses via telephone, the citizen's attitude played a key role in further processing. If, for example, the complainant expressed a desire to see an officer in person, regardless of the case, an officer was to be dispatched. Initial reaction, and one that still exists today, is *acceptance* of reporting certain kinds of calls via telephone. There are instances when the complainant wants to see an officer, especially in stolen car cases; in such cases officers are dispatched.

Prior to the assignment of individual officers selected for this duty, a special training session was developed. The officers were apprised of the various kinds of cases selected for Tele-Serv. (See Table A.) If a Tele-Serv officer is in the process of recording a report and the citizen changes his mind, an officer is dispatched. Moreover, an officer is to be dispatched on Tele-Serv categories if any of the following conditions exists:

1. The offense is in progress;
2. The offender is on the scene, or the probability exists that an immediate apprehension can be made if a field unit is dispatched;
3. The offense to be reported is an integral part of, or is in combination with, other offenses which are not reportable via Tele-Serv; and
4. The EOC operator believes that the facts, as related by the caller, warrant the dispatch of a field unit.

During its first year of operation, the Tele-Serv program in Fairfax County processed 13,192 cases or 10.5 percent of the department's total workload, excluding traffic accidents and warrants. During the year, there were 4,954 cases of petty larceny processed by Tele-Serv and 3,893 cases of vandalism. By tracking the Tele-Serv cases for the first year, the



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department found that 17 minutes were required to process a Tele-Serv case as contrasted to 28.5 minutes by officers in the field processing similar cases. This time difference alone allowed for 2,528 man-hours. Of course, by not dispatching officers to these offenses, officers were available for assignment to more critical calls for service on a more frequent basis. The man-hours saved in this respect are not quantifiable at this time.

What is the department doing with the officers' additional time? The most advantageous facet of this program has been to allow the department to move from a reactive to a more proactive status. Officers have more time for followup in critical cases. Of equal importance is the fact that public confidence and support of the police department has not diminished in any measurable way. The additional time that officers have to conduct more thorough preliminary reports has, in some respects, effected the "weighing" of criminal cases for possible followup. The clearance rate for Part I crimes has risen considerably. (However, the higher clearance rate is attributed to several programs,

not Tele-Serv alone.)

It is easy to categorize a program such as Tele-Serv as a bed of roses, but police managers recognize that there can be negative overtones to innovative programs. Thus far, it has been difficult to measure the overall public attitude toward the program. In a time when the public is burdened by higher and higher taxes, citizens may view such a program as an example of indifference by the police—the most visible public service agency. This feeling of indifference can flow over to other public services. Conducting business over the telephone can be very impersonal; therefore, public relations may suffer somewhat. In a time when more positive officer-citizen contacts are required to engender public cooperation in crime prevention/suppression, such programs must be weighed very carefully before implementation.

Without close scrutiny of a Tele-Serv operation in a large department by a central entity, the complaints processed via Tele-Serv may not be

matched/merged with similar cases in the community. What may begin as one case of vandalism or petty larceny can become quite aggravated when several cases are merged together. One vandal, for example, could be responsible for multiple offenses. Hence, countermeasures may not be instituted to deal with the vandal if the department neglects to review and correlate these cases.

Recognizing that officers like to be near the action, residential patrol may be reduced without positive programs to place officers in these communities. As it is, officers have a tendency to focus their patrol activities upon major arteries or business districts. When residential burglaries are the major problem in a community, specific efforts must be directed to establish police presence in the community. Prior to the installation of the Tele-Serv program, officers were dispatched to points inside residential subdivisions. Now, however, there is less direct dispatching of officers to these communities. One way to avoid

this potential problem is to require an officer's presence in a residential community at least "x" times per tour of duty. This issue, of course, surfaces the discussion of visibility versus deterrence. The homeowner and the housewife, like it or not, want to see a visible symbol of protection now and then within the community. One of law enforcement's objectives is to cause citizens to feel secure in their homes.

Whether or not such a program is acceptable in all communities cannot be answered here. Variations of this program are in effect in several cities. Of particular importance to this program is the social and economic status of residents in Fairfax County. Most residents have insurance of some kind to afford protection against loss or damage. Preprogram analysis indicated that many citizens reported the offense only for insurance purposes without any desire of having a police officer at their home. Actually, some citizens preferred that officers not respond in order to avoid "inquisitive-

TABLE A

OFFENSE/COMPLAINT CATEGORIES ELIGIBLE FOR TELE-SERV

1. Grand Larceny (three types):
 - a. Auto parts or accessories
 - b. Grand larceny from a vehicle (not subsequent to auto theft)
 - c. Theft of a bicycle.
2. All Petty Larceny except:
 - a. Shoplifting
 - b. Pursesnatching
 - c. Larceny after trust.
3. Telephone Violations
Incidents of harassing or annoying phone calls directed at the complainant. (Does not include bomb threats or threats to do bodily harm.)
4. Property Damage
All types *except* damage resulting from an auto accident or those which involve extensive damage

5. Tampering with a Vehicle
All cases unless the incident is in progress or suspects are in the vicinity.
6. Lost Property
All cases unless some unusual circumstances dictate the need to dispatch an officer.
7. Found Property
All cases unless the property reported found involves:
 - a. Firearms
 - b. Explosive devices
 - c. Drugs

- d. Potential evidence related to a crime
- e. Other sensitive items which, in the discretion of the Tele-Serv operator, require response by a field unit.
8. Vandalism
All vandalism except those involving extensive or widespread damage to property, or cases in which the incident is still in progress or suspects are in the vicinity.
9. Traffic Complaints
Includes drag racing, speeding, etc., unless the incident requires the immediate attention of a field unit.
10. Auto Theft

TELE-SERV WORKLOAD

[Aug. 1, 1974 to July 31, 1975]

	Total cases	Cases processed by Tele-Serv	Percent
All offense categories.....	125,054 ¹	13,192	10.5
Tele-Serv categories.....	35,198	12,523 ²	35.6

TELE-SERV WORKLOAD BY TYPE OF OFFENSE

Category ³	Actual number of cases reported	Cases processed by Tele-Serv	Percent ⁴
Grand larceny.....	3,274	1,647	50.3
Petty larceny.....	10,564	4,954	46.9
Auto theft ⁵	2,172	584	26.9
Vandalism.....	11,066	3,893	35.2
Property damage.....	493	12	2.4
Tampering.....	542	109	20.1
Telephone violations.....	1,044	407	39.0
Traffic complaints.....	3,339	41	1.2
Lost property.....	537	296	55.1
Found property.....	2,167	580	26.8
Totals.....	35,198	12,523	35.6

¹ Excludes responding to traffic accidents and serving warrants.

² The difference between this and the total handled by Tele-Serv is 669 cases, or 5.1 pct. of the Tele-Serv workload. These were cases that were not

in the originally designated categories, but were handled through Tele-Serv at the discretion of the Tele-Serv operator.

³ As defined for Tele-Serv, see table A.

⁴ Represents the percentage across does not total down.

⁵ Represents only 6 mo. experience with Tele-Serv.

ness from neighbors."

In communities with less affluence, there may be more emphasis on an officer's visible presence at the scene of the offense. If insurance doesn't cover the loss, the owner expects the police to recover the property. Police administrators recognize that the officer's presence at the scene of certain calls for service has limited investigative value. Yet, the citizen, in some respects, may feel more secure if he has an officer to talk with per-

sonally. On minor cases, a canvass of the neighborhood may indeed turn up leads. While a program such as Tele-Serv can be advantageous to a police department, the inevitable question is: Does the department have the personnel or resources to investigate thoroughly every offense or call for service?

Thus far, the Fairfax County Police Department is quite pleased with the Tele-Serv program. The two major objectives have been realized, and the

overall goal to increase productivity of patrol officers has been achieved. This program will be evaluated annually. As with any program, Tele-Serv cannot be filed away to become another traditional police practice. As change agents, police administrators must remain flexible in their view of service delivery, bold enough to try something new, and courageous enough to say that a specific program is or is not working. Tomorrow Tele-Serv may not be necessary.



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