

9-1-1
Fresno County Grand Jury Report No. 3
July 2019

SUMMARY

In response to a citizen's complaint, the Fresno County Grand Jury 2018-2019 investigated the Fresno Police Department 9-1-1 Communication Center. The complaint addressed concerns regarding the staffing of the 9-1-1 Communication Center, the amount of call waiting times for both emergency and non-emergency 9-1-1 calls, and the possible loss of financial support provided by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) for not answering 9-1-1 calls in the mandated time frame. The Fresno County Grand Jury initiated an investigation to address these concerns.

BACKGROUND

Fresno Police Department 9-1-1 Communication Center "FPD CommCen" is the first line of communication between a victim and the Fresno Police Department. The dispatchers then communicate this information to officers and emergency medical services to assist them in handling the citizen's call for service (CFS"). Fresno Police Department "FPD" participates in Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) which allocates funding to agencies that participate in the program. However, funding may be withheld if standards established by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services "Cal OES" are not met and maintained. The Cal OES 9-1-1 Operations Manual states that 95 percent of 9-1-1 calls must be answered within 15 seconds.

Fresno Police Department (FPD) 9-1-1 Communications Center (CommCen) Staffing

The FPD CommCen's current staffing allocation is 95 dispatchers. This includes six supervisors, seven temporary employees, and seven vacancies. The FPD CommCen dispatcher staffing is derived from the volume of calls received. From May 2017 to April 2018, the FPD 9-1-1 CommCen received more than 970,000 calls. According to Emergency Call Tracking System "ECATS", an additional 43 dispatchers would be required to accommodate that high volume of calls. ECATS is a program utilized by the State of California. This system tracks call waiting as well as answer times, and recommends staffing levels within the individual communication center.

The recession of 2007-2009 led to Fresno city wide lay-offs and severely diminished the FPD CommCen staffing levels. The dispatch staffing level has not fully recovered since the recession and is unable to meet the high volume of calls. In fiscal years 2017 and 2018, the FPD requested

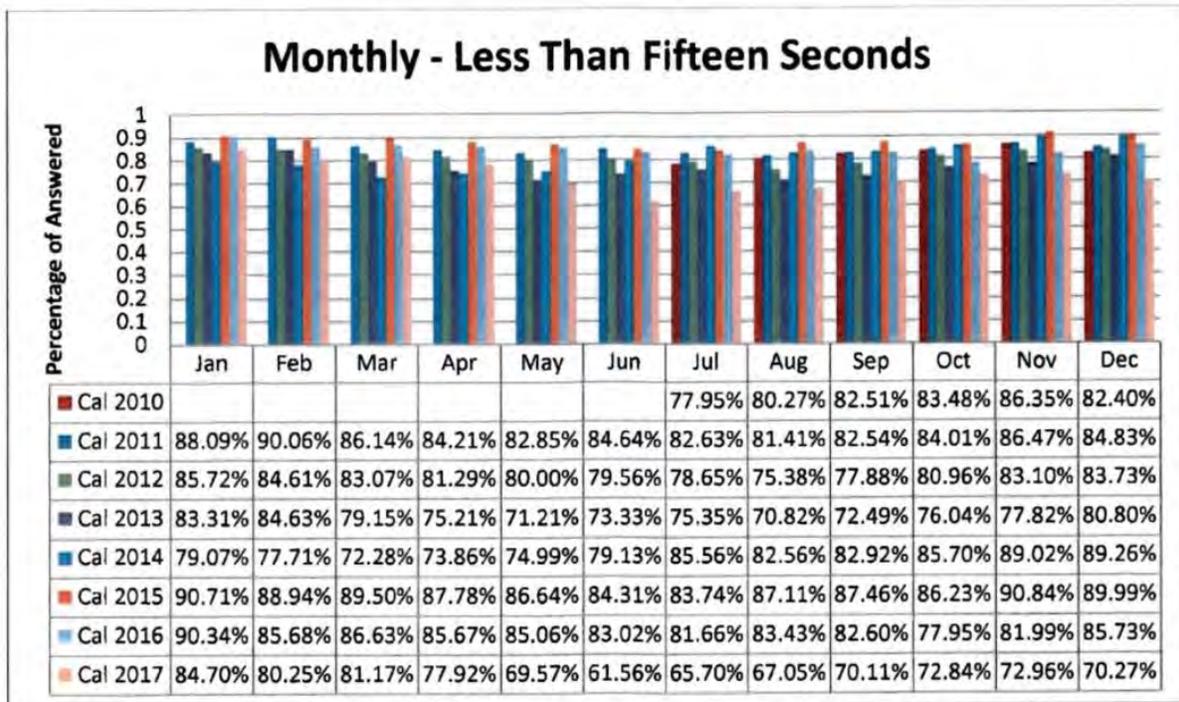
13 dispatchers on their annual budget request to city council and received zero. For fiscal year 2019, FPD requested 17 dispatchers of which eight were approved. Additionally, the FPD CommCen is located in a 2500 square foot underground office with zero room for expansion. The CommCen has 34 dispatch stations. However, FPD management recommends that a CommCen with the volume of 9-1-1 calls such as FPD receives have 43 dispatch stations.

The recruitment, hiring, and training process for dispatch positions is lengthy and costly. The average time that is required for a new hire to be fully vetted and trained is approximately eight to 12 months. The position of dispatcher requires the ability to multi-task and to handle stressful situations on a daily basis. This often leads to new hires leaving during training or transferring to another department or agency.

In summary: The staffing of the FPD 9-1-1 dispatcher significantly reduced during the 2009 recession and has yet to be fully staffed at an appropriate level. Additionally, while staffing decreased, the number of 9-1-1 calls has increased which has created an overabundance of calls to handle by the current staffing. Furthermore, the FPD 9-1-1 CommCen needs to be relocated to a new location where expansion is possible. The current location of the dispatch center does not provide the expansion needed to coincide with the City of Fresno's needs today or in the future.

Emergency and Non-emergency Call Waiting Times

The FPD 9-1-1 CommCen is required to answer 95 percent of all 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds per the California 9-1-1 Emergency Communications Branch manual. The CommCen uses the State of California's reporting system, Emergency Call Tracking System (ECATS), to track their call waiting and answer times. Since July 2010, the dispatch center has not met the established standard in answering 9-1-1 calls. The highest level the CommCen achieved was in November 2015 when they answered calls at 90.84 percent within 15 seconds. Below is historical data that displays the 9-1-1 CommCen call answer times from 2010 to 2017:



According to FPD management, the FPD 9-1-1 CommCen receives the highest number of emergency and non-emergency calls in the Central Valley, and has an unusual high volume of calls based on population. Additionally, the volume of 9-1-1 calls increases during the summer months and contributes to the lower percentages in call answer times.

Additional contributors to the low percentage of 9-1-1 call answer times are the high volume of non-emergency or pocket dials. According to FPD management, fifty-seven percent of daily incoming 9-1-1 calls are non-emergency or pocket dial calls. On average, the dispatch center receives an estimated 86,000 calls for service per month, of which only about 37,000 are actual emergencies. The high volume of non-emergency or pocket dial calls contributed significantly to the CommCen’s low answer time percentages.

In March 2019, the City of Fresno launched the 3-1-1 program for all non-emergency issues (i.e., code enforcement complaints, graffiti, traffic signals). One of the expectations of the 3-1-1 program is to minimize the burden of non-emergency calls taken by the emergency service dispatchers. At the time of this report, there is no statistical data to support if the 3-1-1 program is reducing emergency service calls.

In summary: There are several factors why the FPD 9-1-1 CommCen has never met the requirement per Cal OES. One is the low number of dispatchers to answer calls. The second is the increase in cell phone technology and the usage of cellular phones. The third factor is the high volume of non-emergency and pocket dial calls coming into the dispatch center.

Addressing these three issues would significantly improve the services provided by the dispatch center. The most important aspect of not answering a 9-1-1 call within 15 seconds is the possible loss of life or serious injury.

Fresno Police Department 9-1-1 Communication Center Budget

The City of Fresno's General Fund is the major source of funding for the FPD 9-1-1 CommCen. In fiscal year 2019, the CommCen's budget was more than \$7.8 million dollars. These funds were used for the overall operations of the CommCen (i.e. personnel payroll, benefits, office supplies, etc.). Due to decreased staffing and the increase of incoming calls, a significant portion of the dispatch center's budget is being spent on the mandatory overtime policy. In fiscal year 2019, the amount appropriated for overtime was \$160,000.

Additional funding for 9-1-1 CommCen equipment (i.e. major system upgrades) is provided from Cal OES every five to eight years (based on CommCen request). The last time the CommCen received funds from Cal OES was in December 2016. The total Cal OES funding that was provided totaled more than \$2.6 million dollars to the FPD CommCen. This funding is provided to all participating 9-1-1 centers throughout California and the funding can only be used for equipment upgrades. In order for the dispatch center to receive Cal OES funding, the Cal OES manual requires that 95 percent of 9-1-1 calls be answered within 15 seconds. Since the inception of the Cal OES program in 2010, the FPD 9-1-1 CommCen has failed to meet the 95 percent threshold but continues to receive funding. Although funding has been provided since 2010, there is no guarantee of future funding if the standard is not met. At this time, the Fresno Police Department does not have a contingency plan for funding in place in the event that Cal OES stops providing funds for equipment upgrades.

In summary: The Fresno Police Department 9-1-1 Communication Center has received funding from Cal OES for its equipment upgrades since Cal OES' inception. The issue of possible loss of funds comes from the lack of the dispatchers ability to answer the high volume of 9-1-1 calls coming into the CommCen. Cal OES may stop providing funds to the Fresno Police Department if it is unable to answer 911 calls within the 15 second time frame requirement. If funding ceased from Cal OES, the City of Fresno's General Fund would have to absorb future equipment upgrade funding costs.

FINDINGS

- F1. The FPD 9-1-1 CommCen Dispatchers are doing an outstanding job.
- F2. The FPD 9-1-1 CommCen Center is understaffed as a result of the 2007-2009 recession.
- F3. The understaffing and high volume of calls has created mandatory overtime.

- F4. The recruitment and hiring process for dispatchers is an extensive, costly, and time consuming process.
- F5. The dispatcher training is arduous and stressful which results in some dispatch hires not completing the training process.
- F6. The FPD 9-1-1 CommCen is limited on space with no room for expansion.
- F7. The FPD 9-1-1 CommCen is at risk of losing more than \$2.6 million dollars of Cal OES funding if they don't meet the call answer time requirement.
- F8. The FPD has no contingency plan to fund the equipment upgrades if they lose Cal OES funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. Recommend funding be approved for dispatch staffing to be returned to pre-recession (2007-2009) levels. (F2, F3, F4)
- R2. Streamline the dispatcher recruitment, hiring, and training process. (F5)
- R3. Develop Public Service Announcements to educate the public about the purpose of the 3-1-1 program and the Fresno Police Department's non-emergency phone number (559-621-7000). (F3)
- R4. Relocate the dispatch center to a larger facility to accommodate current Cal OES staffing recommendations and future growth. (F6)
- R5. Develop a contingency plan in the event Cal OES funding is withheld. (F7, F8)
- R6. Research and secure other funding sources for the 9-1-1 dispatch center (i.e. grants and foundations). (F7, F8)

METHODOLOGY

Fresno County Grand Jury:

- Toured all three major law enforcement agencies dispatch centers (Fresno Police Department, Clovis Police Department, and Fresno County Sheriff's Office).
- Conducted interviews with employees of Fresno Police Department and external agencies.
- Reviewed documents from Fresno Police Department, Fresno County Sheriff's Office, Clovis Police Department, and the Office of Independent Review.

- Conducted sit along with dispatchers within the Fresno Police Department, Clovis Police Department, and Fresno County Sheriff’s Office.
- Reviewed the Cal OES 9-1-1 Operations Manual and Fresno’s statistical data.
- Attended the Fresno Madera Police Chiefs Association’s monthly meeting.

GLOSSARY

Cal OES	Governor’s Office of Emergency Services
CFS	Calls for Service
COMMCEN	Communications Center
ECATS	Emergency Call Tracking System
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
ESD	Emergency Services Dispatch
FPD	Fresno Police Department
PSA	Public Service Announcement
PSAP	Public Safety Answering Points

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code, section 933.05, the Fresno County Grand Jury requests responses to each of the specific findings and recommendations. It is required that responses from elected officials are due within 60 days of the receipt of this report and 90 days for others.

RESPONDENTS:

Lee Brand, City of Fresno Mayor (F2, F3 and F6) and (R1, R3, R4, R5 and R6)

Jerry Dyer, Fresno Chief of Police (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7 and F8) and (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5 and R6)

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code, section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.