

9-1-1 Day-Resolution 2016

The Communications Unit is under the supervision of the Communications Supervisor, who answers directly to the Career Services Lieutenant. When fully staffed, the unit is comprised of 13 full time Telecommunicators (otherwise known as dispatchers); however, most dispatch centers remain short staffed due to the nature and demands of this very challenging position. The Deer Park Police Department is currently staffed by 9 full time Telecommunicators.

Telecommunications Officers are licensed by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Education (TCOLE), the same commission that licenses peace officers. In order to earn and maintain a license, Telecommunicators must follow guidelines established by the State of Texas through TCOLE. Five Deer Park Telecommunicators have their Masters License which requires a minimum of 8 years of service and 500 hours of training.

From August 1, 2015, through July 31, 2016, the Communications Unit processed approximately 18,000 police calls for service and over 3,000 Fire and EMS calls. Telecommunicators can answer up to 4,000 non-emergency calls in a busy month, or 45,000 calls a year, which can add up to more than 90 hours of phone time. These figures do not include traffic stops, calls that the officers initiated, chemical releases and other informational calls. They also do not include all of the license plates checked, warrants confirmed, criminal history inquiries, missing and stolen entries, entry validations and many other administrative duties.

Telecommunicators handled over 22,000 9-1-1 calls by either answering an incoming 9-1-1 call or calling back a 9-1-1 hang up in the last 12 months. 9-1-1 hang ups or “pocket dials” are being consistently identified as a significant issue for dispatch centers who must vet each 9-1-1 hang up in an age where over 80% of 9-1-1 calls originate from cell phones.

Deer Park Telecommunicators have to achieve and maintain a diversified skill set for the variety of emergencies they are expected to manage. They are call takers, 9-1-1 operators, police radio dispatchers, fire radio dispatchers, emergency medical dispatchers, hazmat dispatchers for the huge petrochemical corridor in our backyard, receptionists, trainers, public speakers and much more. Each job responsibility comes with different standards, standard operating procedures, training and lingo. In order to complete training, a Telecommunicator must be able to manage almost all of these tasks simultaneously. Unfortunately, nearly half of the newly hired employees fail during the training program because they are not able to multi-task sufficiently to provide for public safety.

Telecommunicators work long hours and shift work alongside other first responders. They put in substantial amounts of overtime to cover for manpower shortages as the industry suffers from low personnel retention. They are the first, first responder on every call for service. They are expected to simultaneously obtain critical information, send resources, control the scene for responder safety, provide instructions and comfort callers until help arrives. As a disembodied voice, they are often not as easily recognized as a uniformed responder, but statistically suffer from the same levels of stress and medical ailments as other first responders.

In order to recognize the efforts of over 1200 dedicated Telecommunicators, Greater Harris County 9-1-1 has proclaimed September 11, 2016, 9-1-1 Day. This resolution acknowledges the Telecommunicators working tirelessly to preserve life and property by being the vital link to emergency services.