

Communications

800.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy establishes guidelines for the basic functions of Dispatch. It addresses the immediate information needs of the Department in the course of its normal daily activities and during emergencies.

800.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Havre de Grace Police Department to provide 24-hour telephone service to the public for information and for routine or emergency assistance that complies with Md. Code PS § 1-304. The Department provides two-way radio capability for continuous communication between Dispatch and department members in the field.

800.3 DISPATCH SECURITY

The communications function is vital and central to all emergency service operations. The safety and security of Dispatch, its members and equipment must be a high priority. Special security procedures should be established in a separate operations manual for Dispatch.

Access to Dispatch shall be limited to Dispatch members, the Watch Commander, command staff and department members with a specific business-related purpose.

800.4 RESPONSIBILITIES

800.4.1 DISPATCH SUPERVISOR

The Communications Unit will report directly to the Administrative Services Division Commander. The Administrative Services Commander or designee will oversee the responsibilities and functions of the Communications Unit.

The responsibilities of the Administrative Services Division Commander will include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Overseeing the efficient and effective operation of Dispatch in coordination with other supervisors.
- (b) Scheduling and maintaining dispatcher time records.
- (c) Supervising, training and evaluating dispatchers.
- (d) Ensuring the radio and telephone recording system is operational.
 - 1. Recordings shall be maintained in accordance with the established records retention schedule and as required by law.
- (e) Processing requests for copies of Dispatch information for release.
- (f) Maintaining Dispatch database systems.
- (g) Maintaining and updating Dispatch procedures manual.

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1. Procedures for specific types of crime reports may be necessary. For example, specific questions and instructions may be necessary when talking with a victim of a sexual assault to ensure that his/her health and safety needs are met, as well as steps that he/she may take to preserve evidence.
 2. Ensuring dispatcher compliance with established policies and procedures.
- (h) Handling internal and external inquiries regarding services provided and accepting personnel complaints in accordance with the Personnel Complaints Policy.
- (i) Maintaining a current contact list of City personnel to be notified in the event of a utility service emergency.

800.4.2 DISPATCHERS

The responsibilities of the dispatcher include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Receipt and handling of all incoming and transmitted communications, including:
1. Emergency 9-1-1 lines.
 2. Business telephone lines.
 3. Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD)/Text Telephone (TTY) equipment.
 4. Radio communications with department members in the field and support resources (i.e., fire department, emergency medical services (EMS), allied agency law enforcement units).
 5. Other electronic sources of information (e.g., text messages, digital photographs, video).
- (b) Documenting the field activities of department members and support resources (i.e., fire department, EMS, allied agency law enforcement units).
- (c) Inquiry and entry of information through Dispatch, department and other law enforcement database systems (i.e., Maryland Electronic Telecommunications Enforcement Resource System (METERS), National Crime Information Center (NCIC), National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NLETS), Division of Parole and Probation, etc.).
- (d) Monitoring department video surveillance systems.
- (e) Maintaining the current status of members in the field, their locations and the nature of calls for service.
- (f) Notifying the Watch Commander or field supervisor of emergency activity, including, but not limited to:
1. Vehicle pursuits.
 2. Foot pursuits
 3. Assignment of emergency response.

Dispatch Supervisor

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800.4.3 ADDITIONAL PROCEDURES

At least once each year, the Harford County Department of Emergency Services shall examine the cybersecurity of Dispatch to determine whether the security procedures satisfy the standards established by the Maryland Emergency Number Systems Board and shall submit to that board a report detailing the results (Md. Code PS § 1-309.1).

800.5 CALL HANDLING

This department provides members of the public with access to the 9-1-1 system for a single emergency telephone number.

When a call for services is received, the dispatcher will reasonably and quickly attempt to determine whether the call is an emergency or non-emergency, and shall quickly ascertain the call type, location and priority by asking four key questions:

- Where?
- What?
- When?
- Who?

If the dispatcher determines that the caller has a hearing and/or speech impairment or disability, he/she shall immediately initiate a connection with the individual via available TDD/TTY equipment or Telephone Relay Service (TRS), as mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

If the dispatcher determines that the caller is a Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individual, the dispatcher should quickly determine whether sufficient information can be obtained to initiate an appropriate response. If language assistance is still needed, the language is known and a language-appropriate authorized interpreter is available in Dispatch, the dispatcher should immediately connect the LEP caller to the authorized interpreter.

If no authorized interpreter is available or the dispatcher is unable to identify the caller's language, the dispatcher will contact the contracted telephonic interpretation service and establish a three party call connecting the dispatcher, the LEP individual and the interpreter.

Dispatchers should be courteous, patient and respectful when dealing with the public.

800.5.1 EMERGENCY CALLS

A call is considered an emergency when there is an immediate or potential threat to life or serious property damage, and the timely arrival of public safety assistance is of the utmost importance. A person reporting an emergency should not be placed on hold until the dispatcher has obtained all necessary information to ensure the safety of the responding department members and affected individuals.

Emergency calls should be dispatched immediately. The Watch Commander shall be notified of pending emergency calls for service when department members are unavailable for dispatch.

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800.5.2 NON-EMERGENCY CALLS

A call is considered a non-emergency call when there is no immediate or potential threat to life or property. A person reporting a non-emergency may be placed on hold, if necessary, to allow the dispatcher to handle a higher priority or emergency call.

The reporting person should be advised if there will be a delay in the dispatcher returning to the telephone line or when there will be a delay in the response for service.

800.6 RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

The police radio system is for official use only, to be used by dispatchers to communicate with department members in the field. All transmissions shall be professional and made in a calm, businesslike manner, using proper language and correct procedures. Such transmissions shall include, but not be limited to:

- (a) Members acknowledging the dispatcher with their radio identification call signs.
- (b) Dispatchers acknowledging and responding promptly to all radio transmissions.
- (c) Members keeping the dispatcher advised of their status and location.
- (d) Member and dispatcher acknowledgements shall be concise and without further comment unless additional information is needed.

The Administrative Services Division Commander shall be notified of radio procedure violations or other causes for complaint. All complaints and violations will be investigated and reported to the complainant's supervisor and processed through the chain of command.

800.6.1 FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION COMPLIANCE

Havre de Grace Police Department radio operations shall be conducted in accordance with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) procedures and requirements.

800.6.2 RADIO IDENTIFICATION

The department's radio identifier is assigned by the Harford County Department of Emergency Services. "Henry" will be the identifier utilized by the Havre de Grace Police Department. Individual numeric identifiers are given to each officer, which will be the officer's personal identification number (PIN). The combination of the department identifier and officer's PIN creates the radio call sign for each officer. The use of the call sign allows for a brief pause so that the dispatcher can acknowledge the appropriate department member. Members initiating communication with other law enforcement or support agencies shall use their entire radio call sign, which includes the department identifier.

800.7 DOCUMENTATION

It shall be the responsibility of Dispatch to document all relevant information on calls for service or self-initiated activity. Dispatchers shall attempt to elicit, document and relay as much information as possible to enhance the safety of the member and assist in anticipating conditions that may be encountered at the scene. Desirable information would include, at a minimum, the following:

- Incident control number

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- Date and time of request
- Name and address of the reporting person, if possible
- Type of incident reported
- Involvement of weapons, drugs and/or alcohol
- Location of incident reported
- Identification of members assigned as primary and backup
- Time of dispatch
- Time of the responding member's arrival
- Time of member's return to service
- Disposition or status of reported incident

800.8 CONFIDENTIALITY

Information that becomes available through Dispatch may be confidential or sensitive in nature. All Dispatch members shall treat information that becomes known to them as confidential and release that information in accordance with the Protected Information Policy.

Automated data, such as Motor Vehicle Administration records, warrants, criminal history information, records of internal police files, or medical information shall only be made available to authorized law enforcement personnel. Encrypted channels are available for sensitive information.

800.9 TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

All dispatchers shall successfully complete training within six months of employment using a curriculum approved by the state Emergency Number Systems Board which includes training on Public Safety Answering Point orientation, communication skills, electronic systems, policies and procedures, call processing, documentation, stress management, administrative duties and disaster and major incidents (COMAR 12.11.03.10).

The Harford County Department of Emergency Services will be responsible for receiving and dispatching Emergency Medical Service (EMS) or Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) duties.