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COMMUNICATIONS

The basic function of the communications system is to satisfy the immediate information needs of the law enforcement agency in the course of its normal daily activities and during emergencies. It is the latter situation that places the greatest demands upon the communications system and tests the capability of the system to fulfill its functions.

The system conveys information from the public to the law enforcement agency through communications personnel, to the officer who responds to the call for assistance, to other law enforcement and public service agencies, and to information storage facilities and retrieval subsystems. The speed and accuracy with which information flows through each system are measures of the agency's capability to respond to the needs of the community.

It would be virtually impossible to design a law enforcement communications system that would meet every agency's requirements. Each system must be sufficiently flexible in design to fulfill the needs of the individual agency. However, measures and standards of performance are necessary to assess the effectiveness with which any department, large or small, utilizes available information technology in fulfillment of its missions.

81.1 Administration

81.1.1 *If the communications function is provided by a shared or multi-jurisdictional entity, written agreements or authorizing documents govern the authority and responsibility of both the agency and the entity, and include, at a minimum, provisions for complying with all applicable standards for this function on behalf of the agency.*

Commentary: When the communications function is shared or delegated to another entity, it is necessary to specify accountability and achieve compliance with this chapter (see Guiding Principles 1.1 and 1.2). The agency may rely on documents developed by the outside communications center in proving compliance with these standards. (M M M M)

81.1.2 *The agency has current Federal Communications Commission (FCC) or applicable regulatory agency licenses and has access to the regulatory agency's current rules and regulations.*

Commentary: None. (M M M M) **Compliance may be OBSERVED.**

81.2 Operations

81.2.1 *The agency provides 24-hour, toll-free voice and TDD telephone access or an equivalent system for emergency calls for service.*

Commentary: The public should be able to contact the law enforcement agency at all times for information or assistance that may be needed in emergencies. Agencies that are unable to maintain 24-hour telephone service should arrange for such service through neighboring departments, sheriff's departments, or the state police. Access to emergency services should be toll free within the agency's jurisdiction or permit free access to the operator. Each emergency answering point for the agency should be equipped with a system capable of handling assistance calls from persons who are hearing impaired. **(M M M M) Compliance may be OBSERVED.**

81.2.2 *The agency has continuous two-way communication capability between the communications center and officers on duty.*

Commentary: Immediate communications capability provides a measure of safety and security to law enforcement officers and the public. The nature of an officer's assignment, such as undercover, might dictate an exception to this continuous communication requirement.

The intent of this standard is to ensure that on-duty officers have the means for constant communication. In most situations, portable transceivers are required to enable officers on foot patrol and those away from their patrol vehicles to maintain communications with the dispatch center for exchanging information, requesting assistance, receiving orders or instructions, and responding to calls for service. **(M M M M) Compliance may be OBSERVED.**

✓ **81.2.3** *A written directive establishes procedures for obtaining and recording relevant information of each request for service or self-initiated activity, to include:*

- a. *control number;*
- b. *date and time of request;*
- c. *name and address of complainant, if possible;*
- d. *type of incident reported;*
- e. *location of incident reported;*
- f. *identification of officer(s) assigned as primary and backup;*
- g. *time of dispatch;*
- h. *time of officer arrival;*
- i. *time of officer return to service; and*
- j. *disposition or status of reported incident.*

Commentary: A control "system" can be a card, log, or computer entry that permits a permanent record to be maintained. Such records permit the agency to establish a control system to ensure a comprehensive field-reporting program. This information should be recorded for all requests, including those received by telephone; letter; in person; self-initiated by officers; or reported to officers in the field.

The control number should be affixed to a communication center control record and the call disposition or result noted thereon. The number may serve as the basis for filing and retrieving subsequent reports of the incident, but it is indispensable for auditing the communications and records systems (see Chapter 82).

The procedures should encourage eliciting as much information as possible to enhance the safety of the officer and assist in anticipating conditions to be encountered at the scene. This is particularly important in certain categories of calls, and checklists may be provided to obtain additional information, e.g., for bomb threats, crimes in progress. (M M M M)

✓ **81.2.4** *A written directive establishes procedures for communications between field personnel and the communications center, to include:*

- a. specifications of the methods and circumstances requiring communications by field personnel;*
- b. the recording of the status of field personnel when out of service;*
- c. the methods used for identifying field personnel during communications;*
- d. communication with interacting agencies;*
- e. criteria for the assignment of the number of field personnel in response to an incident;*
- f. circumstances that require the presence of a patrol supervisor at the scene for the purpose of assuming command; and.*
- g. responding to a field personnel emergency request for assistance or activated emergency alarm.*

Commentary: Identification systems should be based on beat numbers or other assignment numbers, unit identification numbers, or a combination of the two. Operations are more efficient and field personnel safety is enhanced when telecommunicators, supervisors, and fellow officers know the status of field personnel, their locations, the nature of cases or calls for service, and the developments in their investigation. The administrative control “system” can be maintained on a card, log sheet, computer record, or any instrument that permits a permanent record to be retained. The response to emergency requests or activated emergency alarm criteria should relate to a list of critical factors, e.g., officer needs assistance, officer in trouble, felony in progress, life saving situation. The list should be available to all telecommunicators. (M M M M)

81.2.5 *Communications personnel have immediate access to at least the following departmental resources:*

- a. officer in charge;*
- b. duty roster of all personnel;*
- c. residential telephone number of every agency member;*
- d. visual maps detailing the agency’s service area;*
- e. officer status indicators;*
- f. written procedures and telephone numbers for procuring emergency and necessary external services to the agency; and*
- g. tactical dispatching plans.*

Commentary: Communications personnel are often required to contact agency members both on and off duty. They should, therefore, have immediate access to such information as their working hours and residential telephone numbers.

Officer status indicators allow communications personnel to know the status of every officer under their control. All officers depend on the communications center to recognize when they may be in danger. By monitoring the officer status system, operators know where and how long each officer has been out on a call. When dispatching calls, operators also need to know which cars are available for service. A hand-written form updated by communications personnel would satisfy this standard.

Communications personnel also have the need to call other emergency service agencies, such as those pertaining to fire, rescue, ambulance, and animal control. They should have these and other telephone numbers immediately available by private line, telephone index, book, or other means that should expedite contacting the agencies.

Dispatching plans should include procedures to be followed in directing resources and obtaining information on crimes in progress, e.g., bank robbery, pursuits, and/or tactical operations. (M M M M)
Compliance may be OBSERVED.

81.2.6 *A written directive describes procedures to be followed by communications center personnel in responding to calls for information or services, to include the following:*

- a. *judging characteristics of the call to determine whether an emergency or nonemergency response is required; and*
- b. *informing the caller of the agency's response, including direct law enforcement service and/or referral to other agencies.*

Commentary: Communications center personnel are likely to receive calls requesting information or services and may well represent the first contact made with the agency. Written procedures should be available to communications center personnel regarding the proper handling of such calls.

(M M M M)

81.2.7 *A written directive describes procedures for communications personnel to respond to victim/witness requests for information and/or services to include initial and subsequent requests.*

Commentary: The intent of this standard is to ensure victim/witness callers receive timely and appropriate attention to their immediate needs, especially during non-business hours. See Chapter 55, especially standard 55.2.1. (M M M M)

81.2.8 *The agency has the capability of immediate playback of recorded telephone and radio conversations while it maintains a continuous recording of radio transmissions and emergency telephone conversations within the communications center. A written directive establishes procedures for the following:*

- a. *a requirement that recordings be retained for a minimum period of thirty days;*
- b. *secure handling and storage for recordings; and*
- c. *criteria and procedures for reviewing recorded conversations.*

Commentary: These recordings are an indispensable source for criminal investigations, internal investigations, training, and audits of the agency's service delivery system. Access to secure recordings should be limited and available only through a specific procedural method.

The citizen requesting service or the officer wanting assistance may not be able to repeat an emergency conversation that was garbled or too quick for easy understanding. Therefore, the agency should have the capability to replay a conversation while recording other calls and radio transmissions.

The capability of continuous recordings can be provided with a parallel dual-load recorder.
(M M M M)

81.2.9 *If local, state, and federal criminal justice information systems exist, the agency participates and/or has access to such a system.*

Commentary: The effectiveness of investigative efforts depends heavily upon the quality of information resources. Agencies should have the equipment they need to gain access to information from nearby agencies, regional law enforcement information networks, statewide information resources, and the National Crime Information Center. Agencies outside the United States should access like systems, if available. If not available, this standard does not apply. (M M M M) **Compliance may be OBSERVED.**

81.2.10 *If the agency utilizes alternative communications as a primary source such as cellular phones, voice-over internet protocol, or other emerging technologies, a written directive establishes criteria and procedures for their use.*

Commentary: Consideration should be given to documenting or recording and auditing the use of these technologies. (M M M M)

81.2.11 *A written directive specifies criteria for accepting and delivering emergency messages.*

Commentary: Delivering emergency messages is a legitimate law enforcement function. However, guidelines should be established to define the types of messages to be accepted and delivered.
(M M M M)

81.2.12 *A written directive establishes procedures for prompt handling and appropriate routing of misdirected emergency calls.*

Commentary: It is common for one agency to receive emergency telephone calls intended for another law enforcement or public service agency. Agencies should accept any misdirected emergency call and promptly relay information to the agency having jurisdiction. (M M M M)

81.2.13 *A written directive establishes procedures for monitoring and responding to private security alarms.*

Commentary: The agency should have a formal policy concerning monitoring commercial and private residential alarm systems. The agency should seek regulating legislation for the installation and maintenance of the various alarm systems. Such legislation should specify sanctions for excessive false alarms.

Care should be exercised in considering private home alarms that ring into department telephone lines. The agency's policy should also consider the availability of commercial alarm companies to service business alarms. (M M M M)

81.2.14 *If the agency authorizes emergency first-aid instruction over the telephone or radio, employees must be trained and have immediate access to approved emergency medical guidelines or materials.*

Commentary: The training should be approved by a competent authority and should be designed to provide emergency life saving information to callers until emergency medical personnel arrive at the scene. Retraining should also be provided on a schedule approved by a competent authority. The material/guidelines and training should be complementary. (M M M M)

81.3 Facilities and Equipment

81.3.1 *Security measures for the communications center are in place to:*

- a. limit access to the communications center to authorized personnel;*
- b. protect equipment;*
- c. provide for back-up resources; and*
- d. provide security for transmission lines, antennas, and power sources.*

Commentary: The capability to maintain communications in all emergency situations dictates that security measures be implemented to protect communications personnel, facilities, and equipment. Protective measures may include locating the center and equipment in areas providing maximum security, installing bullet resistant glass in areas of public access, and restricting access to the communications center. Providing security for equipment may be done with a combination of security cameras, fences, or other measures based on the needs of the agency, location of the equipment, and operational considerations. (M M M M) **Compliance may be OBSERVED.**

81.3.2 *The agency has an alternate source of electrical power that is sufficient to ensure continued operation of emergency communication equipment in the event of the failure of the primary power source. A documented inspection and test of the alternate power source is completed at least monthly, or in conformance with manufacturer recommendations, and tested or operated under full load at least once a year.*

Commentary: Disruptions in the primary power source frequently occur. The agency should ensure continuous emergency communications capability through an alternate power source. The readiness of the alternate equipment should be ensured by reasonable testing or self-testing of the technology employed. A documented observation of a self-testing generator's performance once a month will satisfy this requirement. (M M M M) **Compliance may be OBSERVED.**

81.3.3 *The agency's telephone system is designed to separate emergency from nonemergency calls.*

Commentary: The potential for receiving a busy signal on an emergency line can be significantly reduced by routing incoming administrative and outgoing calls to a separate line or lines. Line separation may also free up communications personnel to handle emergencies and other important matters in a more efficient and effective manner. **(O O O O) Compliance may be OBSERVED.**

81.3.4 *The agency has multichannel mobile and/or portable radio equipment capable of two-way operation on a joint public safety frequency or frequencies.*

Commentary: This communications capability among law enforcement and public service agencies, such as fire departments, ambulance services, public utilities, etc., is necessary to provide proper coordination and deployment of forces in times of emergencies. The capability may range from simple car-to-car arrangements to interagency and statewide networks. **(O O M M) Compliance may be OBSERVED.**