

State 911 Administration Office Newsletter

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Dear Telecommunicator,

As the weather gets warmer and we begin to go back outside again after a cold winter, we think back and realize the year is almost half over. 2019 is flying by so fast.

With colleges letting out, we see summer approaching. Hopefully, the younger kids will still see some of June outside of school and their year was not extended too far. Summer break typically means more vacations for you and your coworkers. Please remember to take care of yourself.

We understand that many centers are understaffed and struggling with plenty of overtime available. Self-care is very important during this time of the year. We need to make sure that we are taking care of ourselves and getting the rest we need to reenergize not just our physical bodies but our emotional minds as well.

Have a great start to your summer and enjoy the sunshine.

Warm Regards,

Your Friends at the State 911 Office

Upcoming Events*

May 15, 2019

Dispatcher Training
Subcommittee Meeting

May 16, 2019

Certification Subcommittee
Meeting

June 3, 2019

Emerging Technology
Subcommittee Meeting

June 10, 2019

Legislative Action
Subcommittee Meeting

June 12, 2019

State 911 Committee
Meeting

August 5, 2019

Emerging Technology
Subcommittee Meeting

*See the website for meeting
time and location.

Dispatcher Training

Ms. Hart is still working tirelessly trying to get through all of the grandfathered telecommunicators to make sure they have completed their third cycle of continuing education training in the dispatcher training database. This, as you can imagine, is a very daunting task as Ms. Hart must go into each telecommunicator record to look at the hours that are logged to make sure the information has been entered properly and that the count the system is giving is accurate.

For those that enter the information into the database, just a friendly reminder that training is required to be entered within 30 days of completion. Any new employees should be entered into the training database within 30 days of the date of hire as well.

Certification

This is always a busy time of year for the Certification Subcommittee trying to complete as many site visits as possible before summer starts with all the vacations for dispatch center staff and the review team members.

So far, in 2019, the review team has completed three site visits with two more on the schedule to be completed this month. This means the team is right on track to complete their minimum for the year.

Emerging Technology

Thank you to all that attended the 2019 Emerging Technology Forum. This was the 15th year the State 911 Office along with the Emerging Technology Subcommittee had offered this forum, and it was the best year yet with record attendance! There were 159 individuals registered from both PSAPs and the public safety industry. Those individuals covered 43 counties from throughout the state.



Important Announcement

In future issues, we would like to spotlight different telecommunicators and dispatch centers. To do this, we need your help. Please feel free to pass along your stories, or suggestions for the newsletter. We are here to help and inform telecommunicators. Feel free to reach out to us at MSPETSC@michigan.gov

Coming Soon

- NCMEC

If you have any questions, concerns, or would like to learn more about a specific aspect of the 911 Office please email: stephensl5@michigan.gov

The Emerging Technology Subcommittee has the results from the survey and will be looking at the comments and suggestions to begin discussing plans and improvements for next year. We were really happy to see so many of you enjoyed the forum and so many attended for the first time! For two days of training, there are a required number of training hours that have to be met. So we try to offer topics that are suggested by you and offer lunch and breaks that still allow us to meet those requirements. Since there are a number of national and local conferences still to come this year, we will send out a survey in August to see what new topics are important to you and work to bring those to the forum next year.

Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement

Two members of our staff recently attended the free training that took place at the Kalamazoo County Consolidated Dispatch Center, facilitated by the Denise Amber Lee Foundation for Quality Assurance. This was an excellent training especially for those centers that do not have a quality assurance program in place. Quality assurance does not have to be done in conjunction with a particular call-taking protocol software; this can be done with the current policies and procedures that a center currently has in place.

The training day started with an overview and timeline of events that occurred during the Denise Amber Lee case in January 2008. Nathan Lee gave a brief overview of the case and different things that were learned along the way within the timeline. Ms. Sherill Ornberg shared a couple of stories from her center and why a quality assurance program is a good idea. The examples given showed how over time we can become complacent and may not notice if someone is struggling when we move to new technologies. The program's processes also help to ensure that the policies and procedures in place are reflective of the PSAP's staff and what is expected from them.

This training provided some great insights and direction on how to start a program in your center. The training included the basics of getting the buy in from the staff, and how it's to be a tool for training programs, and performance appraisals. A basic document was provided that can be used and changed to fit your center. The document can be found within the quality assurance standard on either the APCO or NENA websites by searching for quality assurance.

If your center does not currently have a quality assurance process in place, the Denise Amber Lee Foundation recommends that agencies take steps to begin implementation of a program. A mission of the foundation is to have a quality assurance program in every center nationwide. Although this is not a requirement within the State of Michigan, a quality assurance program is a recommendation on the recommended best practices document that can be found on the State 911 website under the certification section.



Laurie Smalla, Meceola Consolidated Central Dispatch Director

Recognition

Director – Laurie Smalla, Meceola Consolidated Central Dispatch Director

As the director of Meceola Consolidated Central Dispatch for the past 24 years, she's a champion of the "Thin Gold Line" — the idea that 911 dispatchers are crucial to emergency response units, even if they are frequently forgotten by people who talk about the heroes of public safety departments.

Laurie is probably one of the few people in the state who has gone from dispatcher, to corrections officer, to road patrol officer with two different departments to successfully running a consolidated central dispatch center for more than two decades,

Perhaps surprisingly, Smalla said, when she first moved to the area in the early-1980s, she had no intention of staying long. Smalla worked two years as a dispatcher before taking a job as a corrections officer for the Mecosta County Sheriff's Office, where she stayed about three years. She then worked as a police officer for the Big Rapids Police Department for a few years, and later, the FSU police department, which produced some interesting memories. By that time, in the mid-90s, the Mecosta and Osceola central dispatch units had consolidated into one group — the first such collaboration between counties in Michigan's history — and moved out to new digs on Northland Drive. According to Smalla, the money-saving move was a rough marriage at first. Dispatchers had not gotten much of a chance to get to know each other before working together, leading to some tension. Fire, police and EMTs in the two counties did not have a standard set of protocols between them, which caused confusion. The first director of the new group retired, and in 1995, Smalla stepped in to take the lead.

"I've always been the kind of person to say, if you're going to complain, you'd better be willing to do something about it," Smalla said. "It's been a challenge at times, but I think things in this group are far better now. There are a few other counties, like Mason and Oceana, who have joined together in a similar way since, because, I think it's a great idea. We just had some growing pains."

She recently sold her house in Newaygo County and is looking forward to spending lots of time at home in Allegan, staying with friends and family, before considering her next steps.

She figures she will probably devote more time to her wide range of hobbies; including landscape photography, mosaic glasswork and travel. Regardless of where she ends up, Smalla knows she will miss the people she has worked with, who have become her friends and later, her family.

“A significant portion of my life has been devoted to public safety. Working with my people, I will miss that,” she said. “The people who work here in particular, I feel they are very underappreciated. I've worked for four police departments and I've never been more proud of a group of people than I am when I come in here every day.”

PSAP Spotlight- Hillsdale County Central Dispatch

Hillsdale County Central Dispatch is a small county agency and is the only PSAP in the county of Hillsdale. Hillsdale County dispatches for eight law enforcement agencies, 17 fire departments, & five ambulance companies. When fully staffed, there are 10 full-time and 4 part-time telecommunicators. In 2018, the telecommunicators dispatched 36,369 events. 2018 was a challenging year for them and its reported that the staff did a wonderful job overcoming obstacles.

The PSAP started out the year being short one part-time person, but soon had three people leave almost at once. One individual resigned to start her own business while two others moved away from the area but continued in the dispatch career, they love obtaining telecommunicator jobs in Lansing and Columbus, OH. Both telecommunicators are doing great in their new centers. The PSAP has struggled to find good candidates to fill their shoes. The trainers have been training non-stop and there are currently three in training. Hillsdale County Central Dispatch administration is proud of their trainers who have been going strong trying to get the staffing levels back up.

Hillsdale County Central Dispatch has had visits from Vice President Pence, installed a completely new telephone system, started accepting Text-to-911 along with several other major events in 2018 all while being greatly understaffed. Deputy Director Peters is extremely proud of the staff and sometimes wonders how they do it all. “They are a great group. On top of all of this I will point out that we were one of the lowest paid PSAP's in the state. Our director was able to get the commissioners to approve a raise for the dispatchers to make their pay scale competitive in the middle of 2018.”



Hillsdale County Central Dispatch