

Police Dispatch Neighborhood Watch Meeting 03.13.18

Introductions:

SDPD Captain Joe Ramos, Police Dispatch

Captain Ramos has been with SDPD for 30 years in a variety of positions including SWAT and gang suppression. In January 2018 he took over as captain of police dispatch.

Marcella Teran, Neighborhood Watch Coordinator for PB. Thank you to everyone for coming to this meeting to learn more about police dispatch. A big thank you to Captain Ramos and Joan Carroll from Oakmont for allowing us to have the meeting in the activity room.

Overview of SDPD Communications:

Police dispatch is made up of civilian employees. They are budgeted for 185 positions, but currently are understaffed. One of the biggest concerns is the wait time for the non-emergency line. This has been expressed to all the dispatchers.

In the 90's the crime rates were much higher than they are today. The support of the community and use of community policing has been a key to this.

Historical Review of Wait Times:

Police Dispatch receives 1.2M calls per year that are pretty evenly split between emergency and non-emergencies.

- During 2009-2015 the average wait time for 9-1-1 was 8 seconds and 38 seconds for the non-emergency line.
- In 2016 the 9-1-1 average increased to 16 seconds and to 230 seconds for non-emergency line.
- For 2017-2018 the 9-1-1 average wait time was 4 seconds, however the non-emergency average has increased to 320 seconds.

Some of the reasons for the increase in 2016 may be past protocols, staffing - hiring freeze with mandated overtime, and use of a new system that had a steep learning curve. Because of this the former captain, Captain Jerry Hara, made some changes. He implemented a phone tree, decreased mandated overtime, and was able to provide pay raises. Although they are still understaffed, it's only 8 below budgeted. During 2016 they were 20 below budgeted.

Current Challenges & Strategies to make it better:

The changes improved the emergency times because 70% of the dispatchers were assigned to the emergency line and even if they were not on a call they could not answer non-emergency calls. Captain Ramos has changed this to a 50/50 ratio for emergency vs. non-emergency line and empowered the supervisors to manage their

employees and the calls. They have the ability to move employees between the 2 lines based on volume of calls and wait times. This past week the average non-emergency line wait time was 90 seconds and this did not negatively impact the emergency line wait time.

Another issue is the phone tree. It takes 1-2 minutes to get through the phone tree. The calculation of the average wait time does not start until you speak to a dispatcher. Also, if more than 37 people are on hold, the system gives you a busy signal. Captain Ramos is looking at freeing up more individuals to answer the phones such as those with collateral assignments like recruiters. The crux of the wait time issue is staffing. His goal is to bring down wait time, minimize overtime, and improve the working conditions for the dispatchers.

He is also asking the supervisors to use common sense. If someone calls 9-1-1 with a situation that is not an emergency and they don't have a lot of emergency calls; find out what they can do to help. He reminds them that their job is customer service.

How can we best use dispatch?

Understand that some of the wait time is out of the dispatchers' control.

Learn the different resources available such as "get it done" app. This is great for situations that do not require an officer to go out.

Questions/Comments:

- It would be helpful to have a standard template of what information community members need to provide when they call dispatch so they are fully prepared and give good information.
- How do we handle a situation of known transients blocking a sidewalk when we know they get hostile when approached? In other words, they aren't violent at that moment, but there is the possibility of a threat. Which line do we call?
 - It's only an emergency if someone is actually threatened. The best thing to do is develop good relationships with the quality of life and HOT teams and the captains. If possible get their contact information and contact them directly.
- Has SDPD considered doing an initial screening of non-emergency calls and prioritizing them based on the issue?
 - He is looking at having the dispatchers answer the phones, give some basic information/options, and letting the caller know the wait time for an officer to come to the scene.
- Discussion of the "get it done" app:

- They are working to ensure the issues reported go to the correct departments.
 - Most effective way to get an issue addressed is multiple reports on get it done by DIFFERENT people.
- Is active drug dealing considered an emergency?
 - No unless there is violence or threat of violence.
- How much training do dispatchers receive?
 - Classroom training and then 4 months with a trainer taking calls.
- Can we ask the dispatcher to have the officer call us back when we make a report?
 - Yes. You can also call the non-emergency line back with the event number and ask what occurred. They cannot give you names or some other personal information.
- Does the system track hang-ups?
 - Only for 9-1-1 calls. He needs to verify whether it tracks non-emergency hang-ups, but he did not think it did.