

Communications Center of the Year

San Diego Police Department

I would like to recognize the members of the San Diego Police Department's Communications Center for their overall, outstanding service in 2020. Despite the national civil unrest, which brought scrutiny on all law enforcement personnel, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in illness for some, and brought about constant changes in policies, procedures, and dispatch protocols, every dispatcher worked extremely hard and pulled together as a team. 2020 was difficult not only because of the pandemic and the civil unrest, but we lost 19 dispatchers to retirements, transfers to other city departments and divisions, and resignations. We were only able to hire 8 dispatchers to offset this loss. In addition, due to the financial crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we were also asked to reduce our overtime budget. In essence, we had to do more with much less. In June 2020, we also had to manage seven straight days of protests and civil unrest while maintaining our existing call volume and performance standards. Many of the protests occurred right outside of our headquarters building where our comm. center is located. Dispatchers had to overcome their fears of coming to work and performing their duties while violent protests occurred right outside our windows. Although the world was seemingly crashing down around us, our comm. center handled the most calls in the County. We received 1,302,607 emergency and non-emergency calls. We also dispatched over 500 thousand radio calls. We were also able to exceed the NENA standard, and meet the CalOES standard, by answering 95% of our 911 calls in 15 seconds or less. To complicate things even further, every dispatcher was required to complete their POST CPT credits by December 31st. This was extremely challenging because, in the past, dispatchers were required to complete their POST CPT hours on overtime so that it would not affect staffing. But, due to budget constraints, it was no longer possible to have dispatchers do that. So, most, if not all our dispatchers had to complete their POST training requirements while working their regular shifts. This presented even further staffing complications. While managing COVID-19, national civil unrest, budget constraints, and staffing shortages, we were able to successfully upgrade our VESTA telephone system in order to accept text to 911 calls. This required further training so that our dispatchers could be proficient in accepting these calls. By the end of December, all our staff was trained, and we began receiving live text to 911 calls. With everything our dispatchers endured in 2020 – the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest, staffing shortages, budget constraints, and ongoing training requirements – they were all able to rise to the challenge, successfully pull together as a team, and overcome the obstacles presented to them. They are to be commended for achieving greatness.

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On May 30th, 2020 a group gathered in the City of La Mesa to protest. After several hours of protesting in front of the La Mesa Police Department, numerous individuals in the group began to riot, setting fires, throwing objects at officers, vehicles, and the police department building. This was the start of protest and riot activity in various locations throughout San Diego County over the next several days. Over the next several days, personnel at the Sheriff's Communications Center managed and staffed various radio channels related to the response to protest and riot activities throughout San Diego County, developed and coordinated radio communications plans to ensure local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies could communicate using encryption, and

coordinated with radio technicians and local agencies to either have agency radios reprogrammed or obtain cache radios. In addition, when the California National Guard was deployed, the Communications Center was tasked with developing a solution to establish and maintain radio communications with National Guard troops. Dispatchers with the Sheriff's Tactical Dispatch Unit deployed to various locations to support command post operations and several specially trained dispatchers staffed the Sheriff's Department Operations Center. All of this while also maintaining regular Communications Center operations. The mutual aid response was successful due to constant collaboration between dispatchers and other law enforcement, fire and public service agencies, as well as with the Sheriff's Department Operations Center and the County's Emergency Operations Center. The staff at the Sheriff's Communications Center worked effectively as a team coordinating the Department's response and serving as the critical link between the field, allied agencies and the citizens of San Diego County.