To: All 9COM-Dispatched Fire/EMS Departments
From: Captain Matthew D. Franke
Date: October 9, 2015

We've been continually evaluating and experimenting with ways to improve efficiency. Beginning October 10th, the Butler County Sheriff's Regional Dispatch Center (9COM) will make a change that we believe will improve Fire/EMS dispatching. Effective that date, under most circumstances, the 9 ALPHA and 9 BRAVO talkgroups will be patched to one dispatcher. By doing so, the fire dispatcher will be answering telephone calls less frequently.
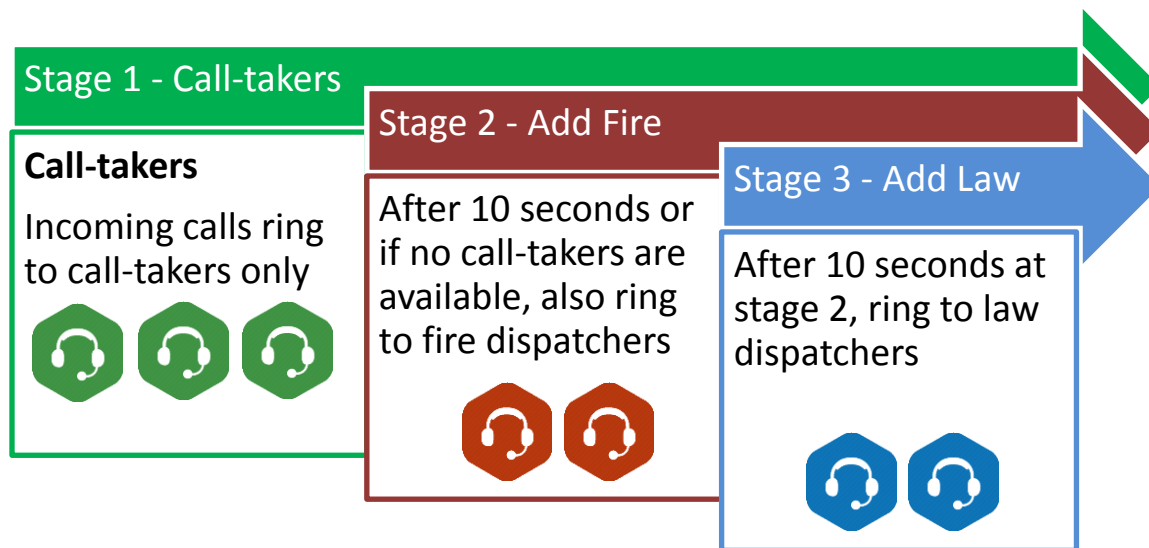
The Details

Busy with Telephone Calls

By far, the variable that can overwhelm dispatch center staff most is the volume of telephone calls. 9COM receives over 20,000 administrative and 9-1-1 calls per month. The advent of wireless phones, especially, has turned what might have been one or two calls about a crash to ten or more.

Dispatchers rotate through different job assignments to effectively handle the flow of work in the center. Depending on the day, a dispatcher might be assigned as a call-taker, fire radio dispatcher, or law radio dispatcher. As you might expect, if a radio dispatcher is on the telephone, it can make it difficult for them to be attentive to radio traffic. Calls have to be answered, however, and spikes in call volume sometimes require the whole center to pitch in and answer phones.

Original Staged Approach

Beginning in May 2014, 9COM implemented a staged approach to call-taking. Previously, calls were presented in a "ring all" format, meaning that the call rang at all positions in the center and could be answered by anyone. With the stage system, calls rang to call-takers only first. If no call-takers were available or if the ring-time reached ten seconds, the calls moved to stage two. Stage two calls rang to the two fire dispatchers in addition to call-takers.

Stage 1 - Call-takers

Call-takers

Incoming calls ring to call-takers only

Stage 2 - Add Fire

After 10 seconds or if no call-takers are available, also ring to fire dispatchers

Stage 3 - Add Law

After 10 seconds at stage 2, ring to law dispatchers

With this format, around 60-65% of our calls are answered by call-takers at stage one. Around 30-35% are answered at stage two by fire dispatchers or call-takers. Around 5-10% are answered at stage three.
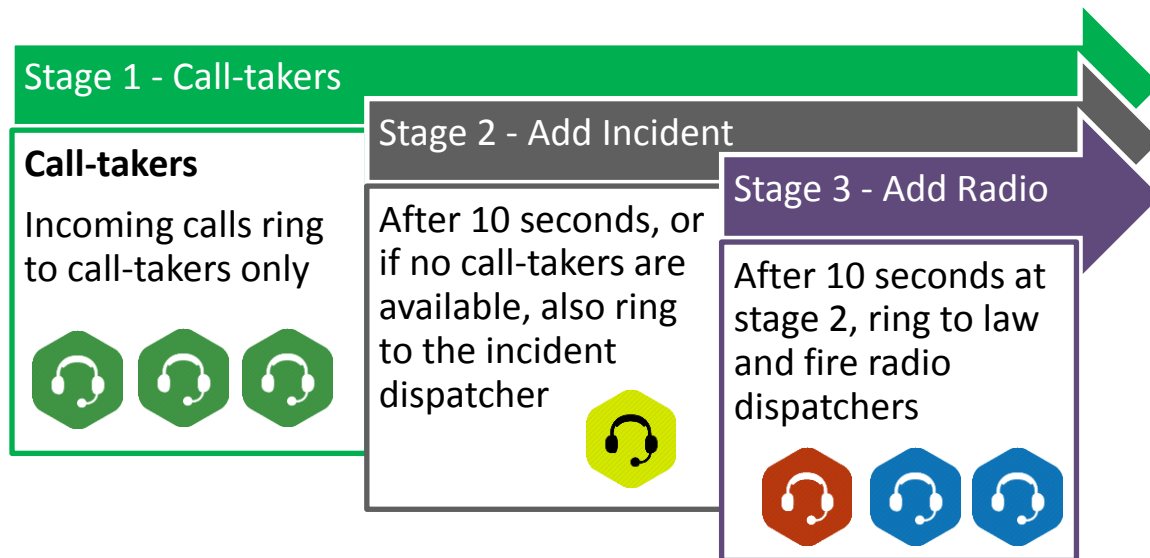
Creating the Incident Dispatcher

9COM will begin managing the patched traffic on 9 ALPHA and 9 BRAVO with one fire radio dispatcher. The other seat will be staffed with an incident dispatcher. The incident dispatcher will handle intensive radio traffic that has been assigned to an incident talkgroup, like pursuits, bomb threats and other major emergencies. They'll make calls for the fire dispatcher, if available, to request medical helicopters or a response from utility companies. When not occupied with an incident, this dispatcher will be the secondary, stage two call-taker.

The incident dispatcher position is a trial, and we'll be actively evaluating what works and what doesn't to more clearly define their responsibilities.

New Call Stages

The single fire radio dispatcher has been elevated to stage three, which will dramatically reduce the amount of times this dispatcher answers incoming calls. The incident dispatcher will be the stage two call-taker. The incident dispatcher will normally be more available to answer calls than the fire dispatchers, so we expect fewer calls to reach stage three.

Stage 1 - Call-takers

Call-takers

Incoming calls ring to call-takers only

Stage 2 - Add Incident

After 10 seconds, or if no call-takers are available, also ring to the incident dispatcher

Stage 3 - Add Radio

After 10 seconds at stage 2, ring to law and fire radio dispatchers

Radio Traffic Volume – Alpha, Bravo, Tango, Zulu

Our two law dispatchers (Tango and Zulu) handle around 80 to 90% of our total 9COM radio traffic. Alpha and Bravo, combined, will account for around 10 to 20%. Based on this, we know one dispatcher can handle the combined fire traffic. With the fire dispatcher answering telephone calls significantly less often, there will be a heightened focus on radio traffic.

What will change for Fire / EMS users?

Field users will continue to contact their dispatcher and listen for dispatches on their A-1 talkgroup. While 9 ALPHA and 9 BRAVO are patched, the system will have essentially combined those two talkgroups into one. Alpha users will hear Bravo radio traffic and Bravo users will hear Alpha radio traffic.

There is no change to fire paging or station alerting. We've always used a single VHF channel for all Alpha and Bravo dispatches and that remains the same.

Reminder on Talkgroup Use

There should be little unit-to-unit communication on your A-1 talkgroup. Traffic should for the most part consist of dispatches, status changes and requests of the dispatcher. Unit-to-unit communication should occur on the assigned FIRE or TAC talkgroup, or on an OPS talkgroup.

09-9F OPS2, referred to as Fire Ops 2, is assigned by a dispatcher. It is encrypted.

09-9F OPS3, referred to as Fire Ops 3, remains available for coordination and unit-to-unit communication between 9COM fire and EMS units. It does not require assignment by a dispatcher, meaning you can switch to and use it without seeking permission. It will not be actively monitored by a dispatcher, meaning you shouldn't call for and expect a response from a dispatcher on that talkgroup.

09-9P OPS4, referred to as Public Safety Ops 4, is in A-4 for all 9COM law and fire templates. It can easily give a combination of law enforcement and fire/EMS users a place to securely communicate without leaving their home zone. It is encrypted.

Contact Us

If you have questions about your radio template, contact:

> BRICS Support Unit
> radiohelp@butlersheriff.org
> (513) 785-1299
> brics.butlersheriff.org

For 9COM dispatch center questions, contact:

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