

911 Subgroup – Improving 911 Service Capability Duties and Responsibilities

Scope:

Emergency Communications is an evolving industry and focus has been placed primarily on evolution of technologies. As emergency call processing technologies advance, the role of the 911 telecommunicator tends to be ignored or overlooked in the maturation of the emergency communications industry.

The 911 Subgroup for Improving 911 Service Capability, Duties and Responsibilities has been tasked with the following:

- Definition of a PSAP
- Definition of PSAP Boundaries
- 911 Minimum Training Standards
- 911 Call Processing Standards

Findings:

1. Definition of a PSAP.

A PSAP is facility equipped and staffed 24/7 to receive emergency and non-emergency calls requesting public safety services via telephone and other communication devices. Emergency calls are first answered, assessed, classified, and prioritized. The FCC further defines a primary PSAP as a facility to which 9-1-1 calls are routed directly from the 9-1-1 control office, such as, a selective router or 9-1-1 tandem. A secondary PSAP is defined as a PSAP to which 9-1-1 calls are transferred from a primary PSAP.

Variations as defined by NENA:

Primary PSAP: A PSAP to which 911 calls are routed directly from the 911 Control Office.

Secondary PSAP: A PSAP to which 911 calls are transferred from a primary PSAP.

Alternate PSAP: A PSAP designated to receive calls when the Primary PSAP is unable to do so.

Consolidated PSAP: A facility where multiple Public Safety Agencies choose to operate as a single 911 entity.

Legacy PSAP: A PSAP that cannot process calls received via i3-defined call interfaces (IP-based calls) and still requires the use of CAMA or ISDN trunk technology for the delivery of 911 emergency calls.

Serving PSAP: the PSAP to which a call would normally be routed.

NG911 PSAP: This term is used to denote a PSAP capable of processing calls and accessing data services as defined in NENA's i3 specification, NENA NENA-STA-101 and referred to as an i3 PSAP.

Further, Rural Alaska is home to several modified or adaptive PSAPs that might be answered by a call taker without access to training, technology or resources that might assist them in adequate or efficient call processing.

2. Definition of PSAP Boundaries.

As defined by NENA, "the primary use for the PSAP boundary is to route call/emergency requests for NG911. This (map) layer depicts the polygon(s) and related attribute information that defines the geographic area of all PSAP boundaries within a given 9-1-1 Authority's geographic coverage area. The PSAP Boundary layer may have one or many PSAP Boundaries contained in the layer. Each PSAP Boundary defines the geographic area of a PSAP that has primary responsibilities for an emergency request. This layer is used by the ECRF (a Next Generation Core Services functional element) to perform a geographic query to determine the PSAP to which an emergency request is routed. An emergency request is routed using the NG9-1-1 Core Services based upon the geographic location of the request, provided by either a civic address, geographic coordinate, or geodetic shapes as defined in (NENA Detailed Functional and Interface Standards for the NENA i3 Solution)."

PSAP Boundaries and mapping layers are more articulately explained by the GIS subgroup. In layman's terms, it refers to the mapping layers that help route emergency calls to the appropriate agency responsible for that particular jurisdiction.

3. 911 Minimum Training Standards.

There is currently no statutory language regarding basic and minimal training standards or certification for 911 telecommunicators from the State of Alaska. Currently, a hairdresser requires more training than a 911 telecommunicator.

The only statutory language found regarding training or certificates for a 911 telecommunicator is Alaska Administrative Code 18.08.082 and 18.08.084 which read:

Section 18.08.082 – Issuance of certificates; designations.

- (a) The department shall prescribe by regulation a course of training or other requirements prerequisite to the issuance of certificates that provide the following:

- (1) Certification of a person who meets the training and other requirements as an emergency medical technician, emergency medical technician instructor, or an emergency medical dispatcher;

Section 18.08.084 – Certificate required.

- (a) One may not represent oneself, nor may an agency or business represent an agent or employee of that agency or business, as an emergency medical dispatcher, emergency medical technician, or emergency medical technician instructor certified by the state unless the person represented is certified for that occupation under AS 18.08.082.

Common certificates relative to 911 telecommunicators are offered by a variety of quality vendors and are often offered with in-house or online options. Training is generally 24-40 hours per certificate, certificates expire every two years on average and can be renewed only by providing proof of continued education (average 24 hrs per 2 years) and a thorough test. Allows for standardized treatment of medical/fire/police complaints. In essence, a dispatcher with two months of experience would be able to provide the same level service as a dispatcher with ten years of experience. Most commonly seen in state are EMD and EFD.

EMD – Emergency Medical Dispatch

A certificate allowing a 911 telecommunicator to follow protocol designed to interrogate a caller about their medical complaints, provide life-saving medical instruction far more significant than basic first aid. An EMD can use the protocol to give lifesaving instruction to include CPR, Choking assistance, Child birth instruction (even with severe complications) bleeding control and tourniquet use, rewarming instruction for cold injuries, burn care, seizure after care, stroke diagnostics, epi-pen use, Narcan instruction, detailed instruction for escaping a sinking vehicle and more.

EFD – Emergency Fire Dispatch

Similar to EMD but the focus is on fire or rescue calls where they might not be patient access in the event of injuries. Heavy focus on caller safety, hazmat concern, and scene hazards. An EFD can provide detailed instructions that might help rescue persons trapped in fires, collapsed trenches, avalanches, back country incidents, water rescues, or escape vehicles trapped in flood waters.

Additionally, the following topics have been identified as those imperative in developing an effective 911 telecommunicator. These topics should be considered the foundation of training, and are not an exhaustive list:

- Telecommunicator Roles and Responsibilities
- 911 Call Processing
- Radio Communications
- Emergency Management
- Emergency Communications Technology

- Legal Concepts
- Interpersonal Communications
- Stress Management
- Quality Assurance
- OTJ Training Guidelines

A conversation on the topic of dispatch training standards is not complete without addressing the fact that 911 telecommunicators are subject to a tremendous amount of job stress, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue. Regardless of their training levels, a 911 telecommunicator is called on to be the calm in the chaos and to provide not only quality interrogation but also instructions to the caller to make and keep themselves safe. Due to the demands of the job, one could argue that their current OMB classification as clerical staff is outdated and inappropriate. As dispatchers are coming to be known as the first, first responders, it seems more appropriate that they be classified as first responders.

4. 911 Call Processing Standards.

NENA Standards For Call Processing – a brief overview (entire document to be attached as appendix item).

Most recent standards were published in 2020, were developed in partnership with APCO and NFPA, and were updated to provide consistency with the other agencies. The standards were developed as a baseline for the development of local PSAP policy and is not intended as an operational directive. Where some standards are intended to be adopted as requirements, others are recommendations. NENA recognizes that PSAPs will develop their own policies and operate accordingly.

The NENA Standards are relatively brief and read a lot like you might expect of a policy manual and make suggestions about minimum standards for policy regarding call processing from 9-1-1 call answer times, wording of the greeting, location verification, call documentation, minimum information gathering, appropriate call titling, handling of 911 transfers abandoned calls, misrouted calls and hang-ups, quality assurance, and ongoing training/certifications. The standards encourage use of protocols and development of policy as a means to limit litigation and provide clarity of duty.

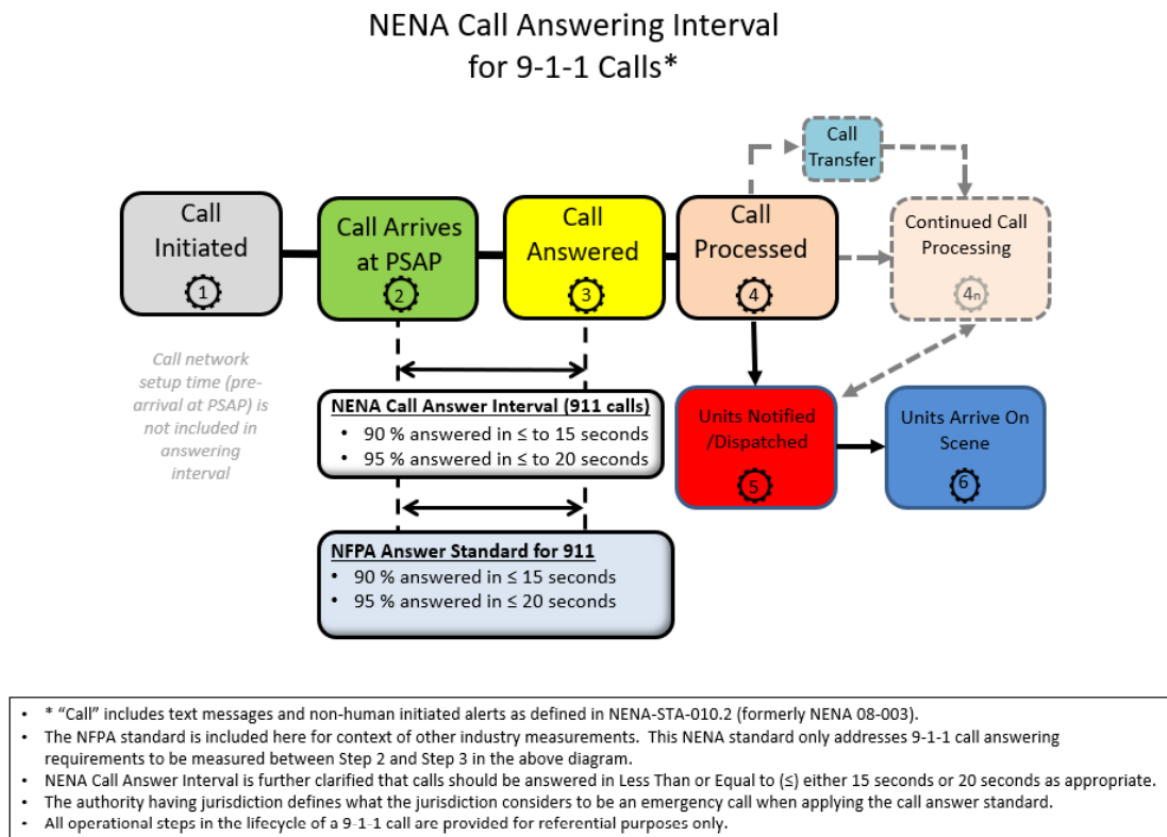
Specific mention of training is brief and includes the following statements:

- Each AHJ (Agency Having Jurisdiction) SHALL adopt or develop approved training, certification and recertification processes for the appropriate call taking protocol(s) with minimum requirements defined for each process;
- Each AHJ SHOULD establish a process that requires telecommunicators to maintain their proficiency and/or certifications and properly use the correct type of call taking protocols for every emergency call from the public;

-The recertification process SHOULD include minimum continuing education requirements and a performance appraisal with a formal assessment of knowledge and skills after a pre-defined period of time (e.g., every 2 years).

NENA Standards place emphasis on quality assurance/quality improvement and feedback programs. It should be noted that these are a valuable part of any training program.

The document includes the following general call-processing diagram:



Recommendations:

Currently in Alaska there is no governmental body or agency that prescribes, provides, regulates or supports training of 911 telecommunicators in the basic functions of their job. This lack of regulation leaves individual agencies to set their own standards and provide whatever training they deem necessary.

Emergency Communications is the only sector of public safety that does not require a number of training hours in a profession where they are expected to handle critical situations. Standardization of training practices throughout the State of Alaska will help provide adequate and continuous training to the professionals that serve as 911 telecommunicators reaping benefits for

both the responders and field personnel and for the citizens in their communities. No matter the level of training received, well trained telecommunicators and their poorly trained counterparts answer the exact same types of emergency calls, deal with the same kinds of hysterical, emotional, disabled, injured, impaired, or hostile callers. They each must make the same decisions and judgement calls that eventually determine the level and types of service a caller will receive. It is imperative that the State of Alaska acknowledge the role that a 911 telecommunicator plays in a public safety incident as one that is just as critical as the role of a firefighter, paramedic, or law enforcement officer. Therefore, we need to do all we can to ensure 911 telecommunicators are prepared for that role.

It is the strong recommendation of this subgroup that the Governor establish a permanent 911 Working Group or oversight board focused on the following points:

- Update legislative language requiring certification and minimal training standards for dispatchers regardless of PSAP type.
- Further classify PSAP types to identify which PSAPs might be at higher risk for providing lower levels of service to citizens and identify grant opportunities for training.
- Oversee certification processes. Approve a variety of training vendors, to include in-house options when certain standards are met.
- Assist in the reclassification of dispatchers as first responders.
- Establish PSAP standards, ensuring all 911 calls are delivered to PSAPs staffed 24/7 by dispatchers trained to the minimum standards.
- Identify opportunities for improved services in underserved communities.
- Provide Recommendations for the expenditure of state or federal funds related to training programs, scholarships, or grants related to improving 911 service through training 911 telecommunicators

The Permanent 911 Working Group should consist of a variety of industry experts representing end users, call takers, industry experts, and would not be complete without fair geographical representation. Membership could include:

- ❖ Representative of Alaska Fire Chiefs Association or similar organization representing the interests of fire and emergency services programs executives.
- ❖ Representative of Alaska Association of Chiefs of Police or similar organization representing the interests of law enforcement executives.
- ❖ Representatives of the Alaska Chapter of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) and the National Emergency Numbers Association (NENA) or similar
- ❖ Representative from an Alaska Native Community as recommended by the Governor's Tribal Advisory Council.
- ❖ Representative of the Alaska Municipal League or similar
- ❖ Communication Center Managers, Trainers, or veteran call-takers from urban and rural areas
- ❖ The Statewide 9-1-1 Coordinator
- ❖ Other subject matter experts