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# Call Processing for Public Safety Communicators

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*Answering the Call*

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# **CALL PROCESSING**

## **FOR PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATORS**

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# SECTION 1

## BASICS OF CALL PROCESSING

### Chapter 1

#### Call Taker Characteristics

Think about your dealings with a company you have called on the telephone. Who is the first person you speak with (when you're not dealing with voicemail)? The people on the other end of the telephone represent their company, and the customer or client gets their first impressions about the company through these front line call takers.

Call takers in emergency service agencies have to use many skills to be able to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands of being the first person to whom the public speaks when they call an emergency number.

As a call taker in any setting, you are not always going to talk to the most pleasant and cheerful telephone callers. Since most people call public safety centres to report emergencies, crimes, complaints, they are often emotional or angry when they call. Some emergency call takers describe their work as hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer panic. They can also view the work as hours of mundane complaints punctuated by the Big Call.

#### **Flexibility Required of Call Takers**

Flexibility refers to the call taker's ability to adapt to changing situations, environments and callers. These changes must be accomplished in an efficient, professional and swift manner. Flexibility is a crucial attribute in effective call takers. When dealing with the dynamics of an emergency call, you as a call taker will be required to adapt to difficult situations while under great amounts of stress.

Flexibility and an open mind allow you to recognize and respond to important circumstances. Consider a routine prowler call in which a

caller hears noises outside his or her residence. This situation could escalate into a burglary or sexual assault. You will be required to obtain and disseminate all the pertinent information while keeping the caller calm, *yourself calm* and answering demanding questions from the dispatcher and field units. Without the ability to adapt quickly to dynamic situations, the call taker is ineffective and a liability to the section.

A call taker must also be able to rebound from an emotional priority call to handling a routine inquiry or complaint. The call taker must do this without showing signs of the previous turmoil. The caller with a routine call is worthy of the same level of professionalism and courtesy as those in life-threatening encounters. Each caller to your agency should be left with the impression that his or her call is as important to you as it is to them.

On occasion, a call taker may be particularly affected by a traumatic incident, or a situation for some reason may have a devastating effect on the call taker. Often these situations are unpredictable. It is important for the call takers to recognize that should this happen, co-workers should be immediately alerted to the situation and that arrangements may be made for the call taker to take a break if possible. However, there will be times when this is not possible due to immediate workload and centre demand. If the effect of an incident is such that a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is required, it is important for all personnel to know that this kind of assistance is available in most public safety agencies. On occasion, the entire shift will be offered a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

The call taker's job is multi-tasked, and runs the gamut from the tedious to the full-scale disaster. Your workload will vary greatly in volume and intensity. Your work environment will contain its own internal stresses and challenges as you deal with the different personalities of your team of co-workers. Flexibility is a critical ability which enables the call taker to be an effective support in any situation and in any environment.

## Empathy in Call Taking

Empathy is the ability to understand, as one's own, the feelings of another person. It is being aware of and sensitive to the feelings, thoughts and experiences of others. A call taker's capacity for empathy is the first link in connecting with the caller and the caller's emotions.

Most callers have never contacted 9-1-1 or an emergency service before, nor have they had the need to. Many are victims of a crime or situation beyond their control and are in a highly agitated emotional state. They have initiated contact to seek help or information and may be confused as to the service they require, or the information they need to provide. They want help but they may not know the process they must follow to get it. You, as the call taker, are expected to provide the answers they are seeking.

For a public safety communications call taker, empathy is the ability to understand the caller's situation at that moment, especially in an emergency 9-1-1 call.

- Did the caller just wake up from a deep sleep? Is he or she disoriented?
- Is the caller overcome by emotions? Has a car struck his or her child, or is the child ill, or lost?
- Is the caller in shock? Was he or she directly involved in the emergency situation? Assaulted? In a car accident?

Empathy gives you the ability to relate to the caller and to establish rapport. When you have established rapport, you will be better able to determine the reason for the call and to find a solution. Once the call taker begins to understand the reason for the call, they can identify the problem behind it, and seek a solution to the caller's dilemma.

Empathy is a vital link in establishing a line of communication with the caller to facilitate obtaining the information required to render assistance.

## Professionalism in Call Taking

Professionalism is a standard of conduct within your industry. You must maintain a standard that is equal to other groups within the system



of which you are part. You, as the call taker, create the first impression the caller has of the service they require. You may be the first contact the caller has with a law-enforcement agency, fire service or emergency medical-response team. You will be judged against those same high standards. You are responsible for ensuring that the caller's initial contact with your agency is a professional and positive one. The caller will judge your agency on the basis of his or her experience with you, the call taker. After all, you will be the caller's first contact with the agency. Your professional conduct should reassure callers that their problems, whatever their nature, will be given the agency's full attention. Conversely, if callers perceive that you have treated them unprofessionally in any way, they may assume the entire organization to be equally unprofessional.

It is important to maintain high professional standards at all times. The caller has contacted you for help with a problem. Each caller deserves to have his or her problem taken seriously and given your full professional attention. If in doubt about how to behave, ask yourself what kind of treatment you would appreciate if you were the caller.

A professional phone manner will help to calm the caller and, in doing so, enable you to get the information you require. Many callers are upset or confused and looking for reassurance that help is on the way or that a solution to their problem is imminent. As a representative of your agency, your initial phone contact may play a part, positive or negative, when contact is made between the field unit and the caller. Another point to consider is that the quality of the exchange between caller and call taker may affect the level of cooperation that the field units receive when they arrive on the scene.

For example, a rude or hostile exchange between the call taker and the caller may result in a lack of cooperation with the attending field resources. Always consider that a caller may be a witness to a criminal offence. The caller's cooperation may be required, not only at the scene, but later, by follow-up investigators or in court. Another point to consider is that the quality of the exchange between caller and call taker may affect the level of cooperation that the field units receive when they arrive on the scene.

## Knowledgeable

A call taker should be knowledgeable about *equipment* and about *the job itself*.

The equipment used by a call taker includes the telephone, headset, CAD terminal, and other pieces. Knowledge of how to operate the equipment used by your agency is essential. Becoming familiar with all aspects of how to operate the equipment will prevent some panic when you need to do something fast. Know how to transfer calls, how to conference them, how to use speaker phones, how to hold calls, dialing capabilities, and so on. Know where the manuals for the equipment are and what to do in case of equipment failure, power loss or other interruptions.

Knowledge of the job itself includes geographical knowledge of the area your agency services, as well as of mapping, major streets, intersections, shopping malls, hospitals, other needed services, and how to direct someone. The professional call taker never makes assumptions. As a call taker, you must have information that is current and correct and be able to apply it correctly to the situation at hand. You will be required to be knowledgeable about the Standard Operating Procedures or Guidelines (SOP / SOG), and Policy and Procedure manuals of your agencies. There is also the need to know about local conditions, geography, bylaws, civil and criminal law as they relate to your department. The call taker must be able to answer questions with factual information, and direct callers to the appropriate agencies or departments. Respond to questions that you are qualified to answer within the scope of your duties, and pass on others to the appropriate persons and sections. You do not have to memorize all details, but if you do not know the answers, know where to find them. Do not make something up just to pacify a caller for the moment; your misleading information may come back to haunt you or your agency. Do not misdirect someone out of ignorance or pride.

If you need to put a caller on hold for any reason, explain to him or her what you are doing and why, and then make the interruption brief. Do not be afraid to admit that you are not sure about something, but make

it your mission to find out. If you do not know, ask. The caller benefits and you benefit by gaining more knowledge.

You will be required to perform with equal efficiency using either a manual or fully automated system. *To be an effective call taker, you must be an effective communicator!*

## Operational Debriefings

Operational debriefings are normally held after any major incident in any public safety agency and it is the duty of all involved to attend. A debriefing involves a complete run-through of the call and requires each person to participate in the discussion. It is an excellent learning tool as it not only shows where mistakes were made, but also what went well and why. Its purpose is to improve the skills of those involved and to better prepare them for any such incidents in the future. Many emergency plans come out of debriefings.

In public safety agencies, the debriefing is a very important element in any critical incident or emergency situation. Because it is true that hindsight is 20/20, debriefings allow the agency to go back and decide what would be done if the situation were ever to be repeated. Much of the framework for future emergency plans is developed in this way. By debriefing all personnel immediately following a major incident, many of the long-term problems associated with stress can be avoided. A debriefing also affords staff the opportunity to relieve anxiety; to identify the emotional issues that are often connected with these types of incidents; and to discuss openly the reasoning behind some of the decisions made at the time.

If the effect of an incident is such that a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is required, it is important for all personnel to know that this kind of assistance is also available in most public safety agencies. On occasion, the entire shift will be offered a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

### Elements of a Debriefing

The knowledge exchange in incident debriefing and analysis includes some or all of the following:

1. Clarify the information surrounding the incident. What happened?  
What went right/wrong? Review:
  - Individual involvement,
  - Response team interaction,
  - Inter-agency response/reception.

2. Positive/negative – strengths/weaknesses.

Review:

Why things went wrong/right?

What would you change now?

Are these the only changes needed?

3. Review individual reaction:

How did you *feel*? How do you feel *now*? What do you *need*?

The best advice for surviving and benefiting from a debriefing is to learn to accept feedback (which may sound like criticism), because it will come. Ask intelligent questions, but do not make excuses. Remain positive. Debriefings give you the chance to find out how others were thinking during the process, and gives you the opportunity to let others know how *you* were thinking. Do not take any of the comments personally – learn from what you have been told. There is much to be gained from debriefings and they should be practiced within the group on a regular basis so that the group can become familiar with the process. Debriefings will become second nature, and the mention of one will not garner fear, but the expectation of productivity.





## Chapter 2 Effective Information Gathering Techniques

### Effective Call Taking Techniques

#### *Assertiveness – Controlling vs. Leading*

Assertiveness is the ability to take control of a situation and is an essential characteristic of an effective call taker. Call takers *must* establish control of the conversation in order to gain the required information as quickly as possible. They must be able to deal effectively with callers under stress who may ramble, in order to determine what kind of assistance or help the caller needs. Call takers must know what information *they* need and how to extract it from the caller. They must be *assertive without being aggressive*.

*Controlling* a call is more effective than *leading* a call. *Controlling* the conversation by asking specific questions will help to insure that correct information is passed on to field units, whereas *leading* a call can result in inaccurate information being passed on. Asking the caller “What colour shirt was the suspect wearing?” forces the caller to recall the colour of the shirt, whereas asking “Was the suspect wearing a red shirt?” may result in the caller simply agreeing with the call taker and thereby giving incorrect information.

*Controlling* the conversation by asking pertinent questions, as opposed to *leading* it, will help prevent incorrect information from being passed on to field units.

#### *Voice Modulation for Conversational Control*

Call takers must gather information as quickly and accurately as possible. Using voice modulation to control the conversation allows you quickly to develop a positive rapport with the caller to accomplish that goal. Each call requires judgment on the part of the call taker to determine which method would be most effective for gathering information. Sometimes it will be a combination of techniques. Experienced call takers will develop their own style and will be somewhat flexible in choosing which techniques to use.



Following are some voice modulation techniques to use for conversational control. When to use each of them will depend on the situation, the call taker's judgment, and experience.

### **Businesslike**

A businesslike tone of voice will be most effective with those who may have had a negative experience with call takers or agencies in the past. Taking control in a businesslike manner assures callers that you are knowledgeable and able to attend to their needs. You also send the message that you appreciate their call.

An example of this would be a store-owner whose business has been broken into several times. He *assumes* that when he calls he will have to wait and perhaps close his store. He may say, "Look, my front window's been smashed out again. Do you think the cops could get here before Tuesday this time?" The call taker would reply in a direct but polite manner with, "I need to get some information from you first, sir, then I can assign an officer to attend to your call as quickly as possible."

Callers may make derogatory or sarcastic statements like "I pay your wages," or "Do you think that they could get here before next week?" Effective call takers resist the impulse to respond in kind, and instead reply firmly and politely that they will be able to address the caller's needs as soon as they get some information from them. Getting into arguments with callers increases the risk of callers lodging complaints against the agency and the call taker.

### **Clear and Concise**

If you have established that you are dealing with an emergency or priority call, you need the information and you need it fast! Use a clear and concise tone of voice to gather the minimal amount of information required to initiate an immediate response, and keep the caller on the line to gather subsequent details from the call.

For example, a caller on a 9-1-1 line is yelling, "Help! I need help!" The call taker may have to direct the caller to keep him or her focused on providing the required information. It may be necessary to say something like: "Mr. Smith, I need you to take a deep breath and

answer my questions so we can get help on the way” or “I really need you to listen to my instructions so you can be helped right away.”

Imagine someone screaming into the phone, “There’s a bad accident here and people are trapped in the car!” The call taker would say: “Give me the location, and stay on the line with me while I get an ambulance, fire, and police response started.”

When you have done that, you can then go back to the caller to fill in the rest of the needed information. This accomplishes two goals:

1. The caller knows that help is on the way and will be in a somewhat better frame of mind to give you the rest of the information you need. It shortens the response time.
2. You can continue updating the field units while they are on their way to the incident.

### **Reassuring Voice**

A reassuring voice is often most effective when dealing with children or the elderly, who may be frightened or intimidated by the thought of contacting an emergency service, regardless of the reason behind it. They need reassurance that they have done the right thing in calling. They may be easily intimidated by an officious or authoritative phone, and a friendly+ manner and tone of voice will put them at ease.

Use this approach when you need to reassure or calm a caller. For example, a child home alone sees a stranger in his yard. He is scared and is not sure if calling the police is the right thing to do. He has never called 9-1-1 before. Perhaps he feels he is overreacting and will get in trouble. He calls up crying, “There’s a stranger in my yard.” A soft, consoling voice replies, “Don’t worry, Joey, we’re on the way to help you.” Such a response will reassure the child that: (1) help is on the way; and (2) he did the right thing in calling.

Elderly people will often apologize for calling and may say things like, “I’m sorry to bother you but ...” You may say something like “You’re not bothering me at all; what can we do to help? What can I do to help you?”

### **Quiet Voice**

The quiet voice can be effective in getting the attention of a caller who is out of control or having difficulty focusing on the call taker's questions. The call taker may also repeat instructions in a low voice until the caller pays attention. When the call taker lowers the volume and tone of their voice, the caller is forced to concentrate on listening to what the call taker is saying.

### **Raising Your Voice**

There will be times when the call taker will have to raise his or her voice, either to gain control of the situation or to be heard by the caller. Some callers may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol and will only listen to an authoritative voice. Voice elevation is sometimes required to get callers' attention focused on the purpose of their call, or to get them to communicate the desired information. Some callers may have lost control due to anger, fear, or panic. It is up to the call taker to get them focused.

An example would be an intoxicated person calling from a noisy bar who has just seen someone breaking into his car. He yells, "Some jerk in a red shirt is breaking into my car, I'm gonna kill him if you don't get here right now, hurry the cops up you idiot..." The call taker would reply in a voice loud enough to be heard, "Calm down and listen to my questions. Where is the male in the red shirt now?" The caller needs to be refocused away from his anger to provide information.

It is prudent to gradually escalate the amount of volume or authority you express in your voice. It is best to do this slowly and not during the initial contact – the caller might become defensive or uncooperative. Once you have established control by raising your voice, you can return to a normal speaking voice. An experienced call taker knows within a few seconds if this technique will be effective in gathering information.

### **Call Taker Techniques to Gather Information**

Voice modulation is not enough to get the job done. You need questioning techniques to extract the required information from a caller as quickly and as efficiently as possible. Callers have contacted you for

help, but you are the expert – you need to tell them what information *you* need in order to help them. Your job is to ask the right questions.

### ***Open-Ended Questions***

This technique is used when a general response is required. It allows the caller a greater opportunity to paint a picture for you and will supply you with more information than the caller may initially feel they have to offer. You must ensure the responses and information are on topic, otherwise the caller may tend to ramble. To keep the caller on topic, ask questions such as: *Could you describe the person for me?* This also allows you to prompt the caller. For example, *What color was his hair? Was he tall, short, was his hair long?*

**Note:** *You are not leading the caller here, you are simply guiding him or her into giving the information you are seeking.*

Perhaps a caller is watching a suspicious person hanging around his vehicle. He phones in stating, “There’s a guy hanging around my car.”

An open-ended question would have the call taker replying, “What does he look like?” or “Describe him to me.” The caller would then go on to describe the male in question, “He’s a white male wearing a really loud red shirt.”

### ***Closed-Ended Questions***

This technique is usually used when only a yes or no answer is required or when the call taker needs the information quickly. An example of when this type of questioning would be used would be during multiple calls regarding a motor vehicle accident. To determine if there were any injuries, the call taker would quickly ask direct questions requiring no more than a yes or no answer. Secondly, they would ask if the callers had witnessed the incident. No further description of the accident would be necessary by each and every caller.

### ***Summarize/Paraphrase***

Summarizing and paraphrasing are effective techniques used to restate the main idea of the call, thereby encapsulating the conversation. This involves integrating the important details of the conversation and restating them to the caller using key words. Not only does this ensure

that the information given is accurate, but it may also stimulate further observations on the part of the caller. This is technique of repeating information to verify correctness is also referred to as “Mirror Questions”.

Using the same example as above, the call taker would summarize the call by saying, “So you have a white male breaking into your car.” This prompts the caller’s memory to add, “Yeah, and by the way, he’s wearing a red shirt.”

Another example has the caller telling the call taker, “There’s a guy in my car and he’s got a collared shirt and it’s red and my dog is barking and now he’s sprinting away.” The call taker would use the *key words*, “Your *car* has been *broken* into and a *male* in a *red* shirt is now *running* from the scene.”

The use of key words again shows the caller you are listening to them and you care about their call. This technique also helps to ensure accuracy in important details of the call. While employing this technique, call takers must be careful not to make assumptions on what was said, or impart their own perceptions or ideas to what the caller has stated. Be clear and concise in your paraphrasing.

### ***Minimal Encouragement***

While this is not a direct form of questioning, it is a technique used to keep the person talking, and confirms that you are listening: *Yes, uh huh, okay, mmmm* and so on.

The call taker uses this type of language toward the caller to reassure the caller they are listening to them and to encourage the caller to keep talking. This method is used only when the caller is on track.

If callers have a tendency to keep talking as opposed to passing on information, this technique can be used to re-focus the caller on the purpose of his or her call. The victim of the theft-from-auto says, “Yeah, this guy in the red ... He’s breaking into my car ... And I just got a new stereo... My jacket’s in the car.” The call taker would re-focus the caller by saying, “Right, so the male breaking into your car has a red shirt. Okay, what else is he wearing?”

### ***Clarification***

This technique is used to correct discrepancies in the information the caller has supplied. The call taker focuses on discrepancies made during the call and not on the inability of the caller to provide the correct information. The call taker states the discrepancy and then asks for clarification.

For example, if during the conversation the caller said the accident was in the westbound lanes, then later on said the eastbound lanes, you could say something like: “I have here, or I understood that it was the westbound lanes, can you confirm the direction for me?”

Sometimes the caller is confused or disoriented. Instead of putting the caller on the defensive by saying he or she made a mistake, you are just requesting clarification.

If you're not sure, ask for clarification! Not asking can cause loss of time as well as misinformation being passed on to field units with potentially serious consequences.

### **Neutral Probing Questions**

Some callers may be vague in their description of an incident or situation. They may use phrases such as, “I think I saw” or “It appears something happened”. What is required is more information. The call taker needs to use neutral questioning techniques to determine what actions or activities caused the caller to believe they “saw” or “thought” something occurred. This type of questioning probes for more information about the situation. “Tell me exactly what you saw ....”

### ***Building Rapport through Self-Disclosure***

Call takers may attempt to establish rapport with the caller by empathizing and/or sharing a personal experience with him or her, though it takes a certain measure of experience and good judgment to do it effectively. This technique works best when a basic relationship has already been established between the caller and call taker. It can be a useful tool for obtaining information from a difficult caller. Used appropriately, the practice can reflect positively on you and your agency, creating good public relations. Use self-disclosure cautiously,

however. This technique is generally not used in emergency situations because it elicits personal information and can generate too long a call. When using this method, the call taker must be careful not to overshadow or negate callers' emotions or situations by focusing too much on his or her own experiences.

Examples for effective use of self-disclosure:

**Stolen car:** You might say: "I've had my car stolen before too. If you could try to remember something about the person you saw hanging around the parking lot, it could really help in the investigation."

**Lost child:** You might say: "I have a five-year-old at home, too. I know how you must be feeling right now. Tell me what he was wearing, and we'll get this out right away. Maybe you can find a recent picture of your child while waiting for the police to get there."

## **Call Taking Techniques to Avoid**

### ***Multiple-Answer Questions***

An effective call taker must focus their questions to a single response from the caller. Otherwise the caller may become confused, and may still be answering your first question while you are already on your third. Such a situation can result in incorrect or inaccurate information being relayed.

Ask questions in order of priority. Go on to the next question based on the information you have received. For example, "Where is the incident?" and "What's happening?"

Instead of asking, "Where is your car parked and what color is his shirt and is the male still there?" ask each question individually and tailor your subsequent questions to build on the information given.

Otherwise, the caller will be confused as to which information you require first.

### ***Caller Cross-Examination***

Cross-examining callers questions their credibility and may put them on the defensive, or they may become uncooperative.

For example, the caller's vehicle is being broken into late at night. Because it is dark outside, the call taker is unsure of the accuracy of the caller's description of the suspect. If the call taker says, "Are you saying you can tell his shirt is red in the dark?" the words indicate disbelief in the caller's information.

If you are in doubt about the information being given to you by a caller, move to clarification. Say for example: "You had said the suspect's shirt was red previously. I would just like to confirm what the colour is?" Such an approach is less confrontational. Call takers should always be aware of their use of spoken language and the consequences of its incorrect usage.

### ***Leading Questions***

If callers are confused or panicked, they are easily led into supplying answers that are not always correct. They may try to come up with the answers they think call takers want. When call takers are leading the call, callers may try to pick up on clues and answer accordingly. Some callers feel inadequate at not being able to provide the answers you seek and will look to your questions for clues.

The following example illustrates how leading questions can result in misinformation. When the caller says, "Someone is trying to break into my car," the call taker asks, "What color is his shirt?" The caller replies, "I don't know. It's dark out." The call taker then *leads* the caller into an answer by asking, "Could it be red?" The caller answers, "Yeah, I think so. Yeah, red."

Call takers should be aware that the shirt is not red unless the caller has said it is from their own observation. Their job is to focus the caller's attention, not to suggest answers, and their responsibility is to pass on information that they *believe* –not *assume* – to be accurate.

### **Summary**

To be an effective call taker you must be an effective communicator. Use the skills you are comfortable with and practice the ones you have trouble with. Use the attributes of each skill and learn to combine each as the need arises. If you are proficient in all of them, you will



instinctively apply them to each situation. Many of our examples illustrate how different techniques are used in combination to elicit accurate information.

Remember, there are exceptions to almost every written rule. Judgment calls are based on the application of common sense, experience and good faith. Be assertive and professional in your attempts to gain information. *Control the call.* To improve your skills, observe other call takers and the methods they employ on serious calls. Double-plug with experienced operators and observe their styles and applications of techniques.

Do not play to the audience. Other people may be watching you, and it may be tempting to try to make an impression. Do not fall into the trap of trying to amuse the other people in the room by mimicking your callers. You alone are responsible for your call. Act professionally.

## Common Sense

Common sense is the ability to apply judgment and sound reasoning to the decision-making process. Many decisions you make as a call taker will depend on your common sense, which is based on your knowledge, resources, training and life experience. Effective call takers learn to trust their common sense for quick decision-making, and continue to develop it through focusing on four key areas: training, limitations, judgment and resources.

### *Training*

Training can be accomplished in a variety of ways. We experience formal training in a school or an institution. We learn procedures and policies and we can practice them in a controlled setting. Life also offers us training. Experienced call takers realize that they continue learning from each other, from callers, and from experience.

You will never know all there is to know, nor will you ever experience all possible scenarios; however, keeping an open mind will allow you to continue learning from your experiences as a call taker, and to broaden the range of application of your abilities.

### ***Judgment***

Always, act in good faith. If you take the proper steps and follow procedures to the best of your ability, your superiors are less likely to find fault with your actions. If they do criticize you, you can justify your actions by saying that you erred on the side of safety. It is difficult to condemn someone for acting ethically.

In some cases, you may not know what to do. If you are not sure, ask. Verify the information that you give out or the actions you take. You may need to pose a lot of questions in the beginning. Ask them and learn.

Double-check, be concerned, and be prepared to answer for what you did. You are responsible for your actions – justify them. This helps you to develop your common sense, and to learn to trust it.

### ***Limitations***

There is a lot to know and do in a call taker's job. You cannot possibly know everything. Some days can be overwhelming. Know yourself, know when to ask for help, know when you have had enough. Your co-workers are there to work with you as a team and to pick up the slack.

You must also be willing to do the same for others. In public safety communications, you do not and cannot work in a vacuum. It is truly a two-way street, the ultimate in teamwork. When you are working in cramped quarters for twelve hours with someone else, you it important to learn quickly how to get along with your colleagues. The job can be stressful enough without your having to worry about the space you are sharing.

### ***Resources***

There is a lot of information overload in a call taker's job. There are manuals, policies, procedures, laws, bylaws and so on. You will not be expected to be able to quote line and verse from every book, but you will be expected to know where to find the information in short order.

Keep a reference book close at hand. Make yourself a "cheat book" that lists procedures that are not routinely done, message formats, and call-out formats. Review the books regularly: learn about dealing with a

bomb threat *before* one actually occurs. If you are comfortable in flipping through procedures, you will know where to turn when a major emergency arises.

It is useful for call takers to be aware of the diversity of the population in the city/area/neighborhood in which they work, and to follow local and international news. Knowing how major events may affect certain sectors of the population will prepare call takers to be alert to local reactions that may affect public safety. For example, a bombing in the Middle East may have local repercussions among certain population groups.

Be familiar with what is going on in the world. Read the newspaper, listen to the news, and discuss current affairs with co-workers and friends to keep up to date news and issues in the world, as well as in your neighbourhood.

## Chapter 3: A Basic Call Assessment Model

The fundamentals of call processing must be practiced *each* and *every* time you answer a call. This practice allows you to obtain the necessary information and to appraise each situation properly. Each call will have its own unique circumstances, but the basics of information processing will always apply. You cannot assess a call properly without first obtaining the appropriate details. This can be achieved by following the basic principles of the police call assessment model.

### Call Assessment Model

There are differing schools of thought around what questions should be asked by a call taker. One method is to start with the five W's and one H. They are: *Where?*, *What?*, *When?*, *Who?*, *Why?* and *How?* Other call centers utilize only five "W's"; *Where*, *What*, *When*, *Who*, and *Weapons* and *How*, theorizing that *Why* is not necessary and will be covered by the other questions.

The questions that are asked and the order in which they are asked, depends entirely on the incident. The application of these questions must become second nature if you are to be an effective and efficient call taker.

### *Where*

The call taker will quickly, and accurately, determine the location or address of the event. The call taker will validate the incident location supplied by the caller using all available means, including confirmation with the caller of the location given, multiple calls to the same incident, ANI/ALI, cross street, the cross reference directory, call-back number, PIRS, and so on.

- Where is the incident?
- Where are you now?
- Where is the victim?
- Where is the suspect?
- Where is the vehicle?

- Where do we go?
- Where do we contact you? Now? Later?

### **What**

It is important to know the nature of the call in order to assess it properly for priority and to determine what resources need to be sent. *What* is happening? This information should be apparent in the first few seconds of the call. In a 9-1-1 situation, the call taker could determine what type of response the caller needs by asking him or her, “Police, Fire, Ambulance?”

The call taker will quickly determine (by using caller interview techniques) what exactly is happening at the scene. The call taker will gather history (individuals/location), as well as information on weapons, and will use CPIC/PRIME if it is available or applicable. The call taker will assign an incident code and priority to the call to ensure that the appropriate units, support services and outside agencies will respond.

- What is happening/what happened?
- What is the problem/emergency?
- What do you or the victim need?
- What do you know about the situation/victim/suspect?
- What did you see?

### **When**

It is a very important question to know *when* an incident occurred in order to establish a priority to the call. Never make assumptions about when something happened. For example, if a caller tells you “I’ve been robbed,” you might assume that the robbery has just occurred. You could be wrong, however. *Ask* the caller. It is possible that the caller experienced a break-in a long time ago and is merely making a routine inquiry about protecting her house against future break-ins. Conversely, do not assume that everything is over just because the caller seems very calm throughout the conversation.

The call taker will determine if the incident is in progress or occurred earlier. The call taker will determine the call delay involved – how much time has elapsed between the occurrence of the incident and the actual reporting of it. The call taker must be aware that establishing precisely *when* an incident occurred can greatly influence the priority, number and type of units assigned to it.

- When did this happen? Now? How long ago?
- When will this become a problem?
- When did the suspect leave?

### **Who**

The call taker will determine *who* is calling, who needs assistance, who is injured and who the suspect is.

You can first determine the relationships among the people involved in the incident.

- Who are you?
- Who is the victim?
- Who is the suspect?
- Who are you in relationship to the victim/suspect?
- Who asked you to call?
- Who should we see at the scene?

Personal information is gathered under the *who* category. This information may include:

- How old the caller/victim/suspect is;
- A description of the victim/suspect/caller;
- The date of birth or age of the parties involved;
- The history of the parties involved;
- Witness information.

In the event of anonymous callers, the call taker will attempt to obtain the identity of the caller without bullying them. The call taker will apply the following techniques to obtain caller particulars:

- Advise the caller that the information will remain confidential;
- Advise the caller that the information is only for agency records;
- Attempt to determine why the caller is concerned if they will not supply their name.

If the caller still refuses to identify themselves, do *not* threaten the caller by saying, “If you don’t answer my questions, no one will attend.” It is not the call taker’s place to judge a caller, only to get the information required to direct an appropriate response to an incident. Remember that call takers are legally (and morally) obligated to take the appropriate steps to initiate action based on the information they are given, even if the caller chooses to remain anonymous. In addition, if the anonymous caller is the *victim* of a crime, the call taker must attempt through every available means (for instance by call tracing or ANI/ALI), to determine the identity of the caller.

### **Why**

The call taker should quickly assess the need for attendance to the scene and determine from the caller *why* he or she is asking for assistance. If time and circumstances dictate, the call taker will attempt to ascertain why the incident occurred. You will ask this question more often as you gain experience in call taking. You might be responding to an intuition that there is more to the incident than the caller is letting on. For example, a caller requests police attendance immediately. Why? What is happening? (This is a situation that includes *What* but may need more clarification.)

- Why are you calling?
- Why did you wait to call?
- Why do you think that this person is a suspect, or is acting in such a manner?

- Why are you worried/upset/scared?
- You may find that the caller is a source of information for the call. However, unless you ask, he or she may not be willing to volunteer the knowledge they have.

### ***How***

The caller taker will determine *how* the incident occurred, how the caller is involved, how their agency can assist the caller (or victim), how their agency can best serve the public and bring the incident to a safe conclusion.

Asking how an incident occurred may help you in determining the cause or history of the incident or acquiring some relevant background information about it. It also may be used in getting directions to difficult areas from the caller.

- How many people are involved?
- How did this happen?
- How did you get this information?
- How do we get there?
- How did the suspect(s) leave the scene?
- How do we find you/the victim/the suspect?

### ***Weapons***

There is a sixth W, *weapons*, which is used in any situation that is volatile or has the potential to escalate into a volatile one, or that could pose a risk to the public or a field unit whether it is police, fire or emergency medical. It is also important to ask this question when there is a call about any incident “in progress.”

The call taker will, without exception, in volatile or potentially volatile situations, ask the caller about weapons. The call taker will attempt to determine if there are weapons involved (produced, indicated or simulated), if someone has threatened to use a weapon, or if weapons are available. The call taker will also determine the location of any weapons involved. Remember that callers may not automatically



volunteer this information, or may not think of it in their haste. Therefore, it is up to you as a call taker to ask these questions.

- Are weapons involved?
- Have weapons been mentioned?
- Are there any weapons in the residence?
- What type of weapon is it?
- Did you see the weapon or was it simulated?
- Where is the weapon now?
- Does anyone there have access to weapons?
- Has the suspect ever used weapons before?
- Where are the weapon(s) kept in the residence?

Failure to ask these types of questions may result in your sending field units to a very dangerous situation for which they are under prepared. If the caller is not sure about the presence of weapons, ask them to check, if it is safe to do so, or advise the dispatcher or field units that it is unknown if there are any weapons. The more information you pass on, the better prepared all responding units will be.

### ***Summary***

This type of questioning, if you practice it as a matter of course, will reduce your chances of making a mistake or of missing information that you need. By doing your job to the best of your ability, you reduce the risk to callers, the public and your field units. Err on the side of caution if there is any uncertainty about a situation.

Obviously, in the examples given above, not every potential question has been listed. More specific details will be covered as we deal with situations on an incident-by-incident basis. It cannot be overstated that each call must be treated as a completely unique situation so that it can be assessed properly. However, it should be apparent that there are certain skills and techniques that should be used on each and every call.

Call takers are required to thoroughly interview the caller/victim to gain additional information that may assist the dispatcher and field

units in determining their level of response to the call. During incidents in progress, the call taker is required to keep the caller on the line in order to keep agency personnel continuously updated on the current status of events occurring at the scene, especially with regard to any change in, or escalation of, the incident.

The call taker, acting as a member of the communications team, ensures that the information passed along (to personnel attending at the scene) is as complete and accurate as possible. The call taker will assist other communication operators as required and will be aware of the policies and procedures applicable to his or her agency. The call taker accurately records information about individuals, incidents and support agencies involved in the call.

Call takers are expected to always perform in a professional manner and be aware that their actions and recordings of information may be an issue during any court proceedings associated with the call.



## Chapter 4: Techniques for Minimizing Errors in Public Safety Call Processing

The call taker must be aware of how much the dispatcher and field units rely on the information relayed to them. They take action based on details provided by call takers. Those details must be as accurate as possible. As the call taker, you determine the priority of a call based on information you obtain from the caller. Once the call has been dispatched, a number of factors influence the outcome of the call. These factors are directly related to how well you did your job in obtaining accurate information. The safety of both the caller and the field units may depend on how effectively you have performed your function.

Call takers are human and will occasionally make mistakes. Minimizing errors in assessing calls lowers the potential risk to callers, to the general public, and to your field units. Safety should always be your primary concern when you assess and prioritize calls. You can help to ensure that errors are kept to a minimum by practising the following techniques to minimize errors.

### **Practical Techniques to Minimize Errors**

Although each call is unique, there are a number of factors common to different calls that can result in the call taker incorrectly prioritizing a call. It is essential that you learn to recognize the possible sources of these errors.

### **Factors Contributed by Caller**

#### ***Caller Lacks Information***

Sometimes callers are unable to provide information because they simply do not know the details. Perhaps the caller's information is secondhand and he or she is acting as a messenger for the actual complainant or victim. This is often the case in the reporting of motor vehicle accidents. A caller will say, "Apparently a car has just hit a pole in front of my house" or "I just heard a loud bang and it sounds like a

bad car accident.” In both these instances the caller is unable to supply more detailed information.

### ***Caller in an Emergent Situation***

Consider the caller whose home is being broken into and who is calling from another room within the residence. She cannot talk for long out of fear of alerting the suspect to her whereabouts. Or the caller may be a small child whose parents are fighting. The child believes he will get in trouble for contacting the police and disconnects immediately after supplying the address. Someone calling from a burning house would need to exit immediately not to put herself at risk.

### ***The Call Taker’s Ability to Understand the Caller***

The call taker may not understand certain callers because of *cultural or linguistic differences*. In such a diverse country as Canada, language barriers pose a significant challenge to effective call taking. The caller may not understand the importance of terms and circumstances referred to by the call taker. Moreover, people from certain cultures may not think highly of emergency service personnel and may thus be reluctant to supply information.

Callers are diverse, often coming from cultural backgrounds unfamiliar to the call taker. The call taker may not realize the importance of certain terms used by the caller; therefore, *language* can be a significant barrier to the call taker. Many callers do not have a full command of the English language and some have none at all. Many agencies employ the use of a translation service such as the AT&T Language Line, or keep a resource list of contact people with language skills.

*Age* can be a factor as well. Young children and seniors present challenges to the call taker in that they may not understand the procedures that a call taker has to follow to gather details of a call. Age also plays a part in the caller’s willingness to supply those details. Children are often nervous about making the call, while seniors are often apologetic. Dealing with these types of situations require the call taker to be patient, using conversational control to obtain the necessary information.

There will be times when it is difficult to hear the caller. *Background noise* from a scene or the noise level in your own communication centre may affect your ability to understand what the caller is saying.

### ***Influence of Caller's Attitude***

Callers frequently seek immediate solutions or actions to their problems and are often *insistent* and *demanding* of the call taker. Often there are cases where the caller name drops to demand immediate action by an agency. Call takers who are not in control of the call often fall victim to allowing the caller to tell them what to do. They either become too anxious to please the caller, or want to disconnect from him or her. The end result is that they do not collect enough information. Without sufficient details the call taker cannot assess a call properly. Lack of information could also result in an inappropriate response from the emergency agency, one that is contrary to policy. An example of such a situation would be the caller who demands emergency response for a routine call.

It is easy to get caught up in the emotions of callers who are distraught, injured or panicked. The call taker who panics along with the caller runs the risk of *overrating* the call. The caller with the strange male in their backyard may be completely hysterical. But if the call taker remains objective and asks a few more questions, the caller may realize the prowler is just a neighbor retrieving a soccer ball from the caller's yard.

On the opposite end of the scale is the caller who is completely calm yet still involved in an emergency situation. The caller may be in shock, unaware of the danger of her predicament or simply someone who is in control of her emotions. The call taker who assumes that a calm caller is not involved in an emergency situation runs the risk of *underrating* the call. Never assess a call based on the caller's tone of voice. Assess a call based on the *details* of the call.

### ***Caller Is Disabled (Physical or Emotional Trauma)***

A caller who is injured may be physically incapable of maintaining a phone conversation. Certain physical disabilities may prevent the caller from getting a point across or from sounding coherent to the call taker.

Trauma may affect the emotions of the caller and influence his ability to communicate his problem or whereabouts accurately.

### ***Caller Is Offensive***

Some callers may be extremely abusive and may use distasteful language. Callers may attack you personally, challenging everything from your ability to do your job, to the sound of your voice.

Call takers may be so offended or intimidated by the caller's language that they will hurry through the call or even disconnect from it. In such instances, call takers run the risk of concentrating on the *person* who is verbally attacking them, rather than on the job at hand, potentially reducing their ability to get the necessary facts from the caller.

When call takers have the required information, they will advise the abusive caller that help is on the way. Should the caller continue to be abusive, inform them that you are now hanging up, and reinforce the fact that emergency services are en route to deal with the situation.

### ***Caller Is Impaired***

Many callers will be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This impairment may affect their ability to communicate their problems, offer accurate details, or even form proper words. Callers under the influence can be obnoxious, uncooperative and demanding. They can also be over-anxious to help, difficult to keep on topic and a liability to the field units at the scene. Never *assume* that a caller who sounds drunk or stoned is supplying accurate information. You should assume however that he or she has a legitimate problem, at least until you find out otherwise.

## Factors Contributed by Call Taker

Call takers are not only impaired by callers' inability to convey important information. They can also suffer from problems of their own that prevent them from doing their jobs effectively. Again, being aware of these potential pitfalls is an important first step towards being able to avoid them completely.

### *Liability Concerns*

Though liability is an area of concern for the call taker, it can never be the primary consideration. Call takers who are fearful of litigation may misdirect their focus instead of attending to the job of gathering information. They may miss important details or follow an inappropriate line of questioning because they are trying to function within self-serving or protective parameters. Knowing the job and doing it thoroughly will reduce the probability of personal liability.

### *Area Knowledge*

Experienced call takers can immediately associate an individual to an address, or a previous incident to an individual. They are familiar with types of calls that often originate from certain bars or neighborhoods in their area. They use this history as a *guideline* in assessing calls, not as a way of assuming the outcome of a current call. Call takers who lack knowledge specific to their area may not realize the significance of a call to a certain location, or the potential risk to the public or field units that are associated with that location.

### *Inexperience*

Emergency call processing can be incredibly stressful. The callers can be extremely demanding. Inexperience in dealing with different types of callers or incidents often plays a part in underrating or overrating calls. For example, the inexperienced call taker may lack the communication skills needed to gather all the relevant information from some types of callers. Or, as a result of his or her inexperience with a particular type of incident, the call taker may be unable to accurately assess potential hazards that may put the caller, field units, or the community at risk.



An inexperienced call taker may be proficient in dealing with one emergency call at a time, but have no experience in dealing with multiple situations and the stress that accompanies them. Emergency calls bring demands not only from the callers themselves, but from other call takers, dispatchers, supervisors, and field units as well.

Call takers constantly move from routine to urgent calls and back. However, as you acquire experience in call processing, you will find that you can control your stress more and more. Much of what you do on a day-to-day basis increases your level of experience. You are likely to improve as a call taker with every call you handle.

### ***Prejudices***

Prejudice in call taking refers to formulating pre-judgements of callers and situations. In such cases, call takers make assumptions based on previous experiences. Such assumptions affect their ability to make sound judgements based on the current, unique information. Call takers should never become complacent to the point where they feel that they have heard it all.

Perhaps you noticed a stranger in your own backyard last year. The stranger walked around for a few minutes then disappeared out a gate into the alley. You watched your yard but the person never reappeared, so you forgot about it and never called it in.

This incident could have formed the basis of a prowler call, but for you, a stranger in the backyard turned out not to be such a big deal.

Consequently, when a caller presents you with a similar situation, you make *assumptions* on the outcome of the call based on your own experience. Instead of assessing the call on the information supplied, your *prejudice* may result in you underrating the call and putting the caller and field units at risk. In downplaying incidents based on your prejudices, you also negate the emotions of the caller and run the risk of not assessing the call properly. As well, you may alienate the caller and jeopardize the rapport that you need to establish with the caller.

On the other hand, if every prowler call you have dealt with has resulted in a more serious outcome, your prejudice may result in you overrating the call. Call takers may make assumptions about a call

based on their experience of similar calls or callers. Such pre-judgments can affect their ability to make sound decisions based on the facts, and could ultimately put the caller and the responding field units at risk. In addition, the caller may have the call taker's conviction that their problem is not particularly important. Such lack of concern could alienate the caller, and could be costly down the line in terms of cooperation with field units. Remember, the caller could provide information that is vital to an investigation – do not prejudge them.

*Remember to assess a call based entirely on fact.* Each call should be judged on its own merits and its own set of circumstances.

### ***Lazy or Hurried Call Taker***

Routine calls are much easier to deal with than emergency calls. The call taker is at leisure to ask the right questions, the caller has the time to give out the information, and the stakes are generally lower. Such calls can be so relaxed that call takers may become complacent in fulfilling their duties. Such complacency is a mistake, even for routine calls. Lazy call takers will ask just enough questions to get a caller off the line and out of their lives. They do not like to be interrupted from what they are doing – especially when work is causing the interruption. However, in rushing through a call, they could miss important information that could radically alter a call's significance. Lazy call takers work properly only when *they* are prepared to work.

Perhaps you are just sitting down to your workstation after battling traffic to arrive at work on time. Maybe you need a few minutes to relax and get organized. The phone rings immediately. The woman caller has an unknown male in her backyard. It is eight o'clock on a Monday morning. You hurry through the call because you are anxious to get your desk in order, have a coffee, and find your notebook. You enter the call with a minimum of details as "routine".

You have not signed on to the computer. You cannot find a pen. You do not bother to get a good description of the prowler. After all, he is probably just some teenager taking a shortcut to school. You do not know he was wearing a red shirt and carrying something long in his

hand. The dispatcher does not know either, so this information is not passed on to the attending unit.

The field unit arrives and finds the patio door smashed in. The caller is lying just inside the doorway, now a victim of a sexual assault. A passerby, wearing a red shirt, asks what is going on and is sent on his way. Later, the victim's neighbor finds a rusty crowbar in his yard and, thinking it has been there all winter, tosses it into the garbage.

A caller has been victimized, a potential suspect has escaped, evidence has been discarded and the field units have been put at risk, all because the call taker was too lazy to find a pen or sign-on to the computer. The number of detailed notes taken by a call taker could potentially be vital to an investigation. Each time you answer the phone as a call taker, you must be prepared, with all of the equipment required to do your job efficiently and effectively.

### ***Workload Due to Volume or Situation***

Call takers in even the best-equipped call centres can experience overload. There may not be enough people on staff to cover for call takers who are on their breaks, on holiday, or on leave. As a consequence, call takers may find themselves having to deal with telephones that are constantly ringing. They may feel pressure to hurry through calls in order to answer all the lines. In some cases, call takers may have to deal with multiple calls associated with a single incident. Numerous people might call about a motor vehicle accident at a major intersection. If anything, the number of such calls is likely to increase as more and more people use cellular phones.

You may have a rash of break-and-enter complaints after a long weekend. The sheer volume of calls may result in the call taker being unable to answer and assess all incoming calls. Because of expectations from callers, supervisors, dispatcher and field units, the call taker may feel pressured to hurry through a call and not take the time to gather the information necessary to properly assess and accurately prioritize it. The call taker may be tempted to not spend the time necessary to gather all of the information required from the caller. He or she may feel pressure to get the caller off the line and move on to the next call. Such

haste, however, can be counterproductive, resulting in an improper assessment of the call.

Using the call assessment model each time you answer the phone will assist in eliminating this type of problem. Most types of calls can be dealt with adequately in less than 60 seconds by using the proper questioning techniques.



## SECTION 2

# REFERENCE MATERIALS AND TECHNICAL TERMS

### Chapter 1: Agency Reference Materials

#### **Agency Reference Materials**

Every call taker should become familiar with the various types of reference material available to them in their agency. The following are some of the materials you will need to know how to use.

#### **Policy and Procedures Manuals**

Policy and procedures manuals are simply defined as a set of rules and regulations for your agency. Each agency will have its own set of policy and procedures manuals, as well as manuals specific to a site or location. For example, there are policy and procedures manuals which are found at each detachment of the RCMP and manuals that are unique to each detachment. The same is true for all agencies. Each individual location, detachment, hall or station is likely to have its own set of procedures that are particular to its area.

Agency manuals create an understanding among personnel, promote consistency in actions taken by personnel and provide reference materials. They establish a chain of command within the structure of the agency and provide guidelines for the accountability of staff members. These manuals also address the responsibilities of personnel, supervisors and the agency in their handling of calls and situations. They also address the issue of inter-agency dealings. One example of a topic in such manuals would be the police's responsibility to protect life and property as mandated through the solicitor general.

## **Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines (SOPs/SOGs)**

Communications centres also have their own unique set of operational directives. This directive goes by several names – Telecoms Manual, Standard Operating Procedures, Standard Operating Guidelines and so on. SOPs and SOGs contain the procedures applicable to the operation of the call taking and dispatch functions and can be quite different from the departmental policy and procedures manuals. SOPs ideally contain clear and concise operating instructions outlining the procedures that call takers and dispatchers follow for handling emergency calls. SOPs provide details on responding to calls, setting up quadrants or perimeters, setting priorities, and who should be contacted for certain types of calls. SOPs also describe how routine calls should be handled.

Procedures for certain types of calls can and do change. Call takers must be aware of these often frequent changes and keep up with them as they can affect their jobs. Call takers must always be aware of their responsibilities within their agency and keep up to date with any changes to these manuals that pertain to their job. Call takers should know where these manuals are located; how to find material within the document; and how different procedures are referenced or indexed. As a call taker, you should know where to find this information and be comfortable looking for particular details.

If you cannot locate the information you require, or are unclear about how the material applies to you, ask. In order to ask the right person, you must understand the chain of command within your agency. Do not waste valuable time chasing down answers from someone who is not in a position to give them. Find out who can help you and ask intelligent, well-thought-out questions. Be professional in your inquiry.

It is difficult to memorize all the information stored in these manuals. There are volumes of policy and procedures within any given agency and they are constantly changing. Many of the procedures are disaster oriented and a call taker will probably never be called upon to apply them until such a situation arises. Study these procedures and know the basic elements, in particular your communication centre's manual on standard operating procedures. You may never be on shift when an

aircraft disaster occurs but you should always be prepared for one. In any catastrophic emergency or disaster situation, time is a critical factor. You do not want to be looking up the procedures for an airplane crash or a toxic chemical spill at the time of the emergency. These manuals will certainly provide you with invaluable reference material in the event that you are actually called upon to handle such an emergency. You should also be familiar with the general guidelines contained in the operating procedures manuals well in advance of a disaster.

Effective call takers will use down time on the job to familiarize themselves with each agency's policies and procedures. They will practice using the manuals so they understand how they work. Effective call takers leave nothing to chance.

### **Cross Reference Directories**

A Criss Cross, Might's, or similar type of directory is a reference tool that looks like a phone book and cross references telephone subscribers to their address and phone number. They are available, not just to emergency services, but to members of the public at the local library. Many of these directories are now available on-line or in a CD-ROM format, and are updated monthly.

This directory is a valuable tool for obtaining address information (or for verifying it), especially when the automated tools (ALI/ANI) are not available. The directories contain information gathered by a private company. As the companies rely to some extent on people volunteering information about themselves, the information they provide may not be complete. Cross reference directories offer information about the occupation of the resident, whether the occupants own their home or rent it, and a variety of other items. Become familiar with the type of directory available to your agency and practice using it.

Each directory will have its issuing year displayed on the front cover. Back issues as well as current ones are frequently used by call takers, field units, and investigators. Remember, however, that not all subscribers are listed and that the information goes out of date quickly and is not always accurate, as people move or die. It is only a tool to



assist call takers and field units and is not to be taken as fact solely on its own.

## **Jurisdictional Maps and Grid Systems**

It is the call taker's responsibility to not only be familiar with, but also proficient in, the use of maps and grid systems pertaining to the area in which he or she works. It is important for you as a call taker to understand basic directions, how they apply to where you work and how to use direction references when eliciting information from a caller. Many callers get confused when giving directions. You can be of great assistance by simply pointing out, for example, that north is towards the mountains, or east is towards the lake. Mapping is done on a grid system which is particularly beneficial in areas without street addresses, such as mountainous locations, undeveloped areas, airports and so on. Global Positioning Systems (GPSs) use a grid system with information triangulated from satellites. In the case of jurisdictional disputes, it is essential to know your agency's boundaries.

You should know which main streets run north/south and which avenues run east/west and be familiar with the location of popular landmarks and major intersections. The efficient call taker will be aware of the characteristics of different areas within his or her area and the names attached to each. For example, most cities are divided into districts, boroughs, neighbourhoods or zones (such as the West End, Sunnyside, Bay Area, Fairview, Kensington, and so on). Each of these areas has its own particular features that may assist the call taker in assigning units or assessing the call.

A good call taker will know how the block numbers of a residential or business address correspond with cross streets or direction. Many areas have shortcuts to understanding this relationship. Learn them and use them.

Any area you work in will change constantly with the addition of new streets and buildings. As an efficient call taker, you will keep yourself informed on these changes and how they may affect all aspects of your job. Familiarize yourself with the location of airports, bus and train stations, hospitals and areas of importance or recurrent attendance by

your field units. Learn the location of bridges, tunnels, and the major thoroughfares that provide entry and exit points to your area. Be able to pinpoint them quickly on a map. Take advantage of any opportunity you may have to visit these sites. It is always easier to dispatch to, or coordinate calls at, an area or building you can visualize.

Become familiar with the physical geography (topography) of your area and the different support agencies that operate within its boundaries. For example, you may need to deal, on occasion, with Mountain Search and Rescue units or Avalanche Control units if your agency operates in a mountainous area or with the Coast Guard or Harbour Patrol if it is in a maritime region.

You should know the areas bordering your agency geographically as well as the agencies responsible for bordering areas. This information is vital in situations of car chases, mutual aid or overlapping response. It also cuts down on a caller being shuffled from agency to agency because the call taker is uninformed as to where to direct the call. Do not pass the buck out of ignorance.

## **ID Checking Guide**

These guides are useful to verify the format and appearance of driver's licenses and license plates across Canada and the United States and are updated annually. They also provide some information on citizenship cards, ID cards and credit cards. This is a good tool to help identify if an ID has been tampered with and to assist in reading information from them such as the DOB, class of license, and so on.

## **Telephone Directory/Yellow Pages**

Never underestimate the usefulness of the telephone directory and yellow pages. After all, they are updated annually, and contain much valuable information: phone numbers and area codes, dialing codes for national and international locations, time zones and emergency numbers. They also include useful information on bus routes, local information, and the phone numbers for such services as the Talking Yellow Pages.

## Other Sources of Reference

- Powerphone or similar books
- Quality Assurance software
- Criminal Code and other Statutes
- Other agencies
- Senior staff and co-workers
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC)
- Language Line
- TV/radio/newspapers/magazines
- Haz Mat Response Book (“Haz Mat” is a contraction of “hazardous materials”)
- Library
- Address of Interest books (AOI), which list locations that required a specialized type of response from public safety agencies.

## Locating Resource Materials

Where are you going to look for resource materials?

- Library
- Textbooks
- Contacts in the industry
- Telecommunications companies, power supply companies
- Communications centres
- Information sharing with other members (maybe someone who works for a telecommunications company)
- The Internet

## Report Writing

This is one of the basic skills required of everyone in public safety communications. The following points will help you to write clear and concise reports.

- **List and Schedule your Tasks** – Identify your goals. Look at the calendar and work back from the due date. Break the assignment down into smaller tasks.
- **Generate Ideas** – Depending on the kind of information that you need for your report, use anything from brainstorming to networking.
- **Refine Your Initial Ideas** – Sort them out, group similar thoughts together and combine them as appropriate.
- **Consider Your Audience** – Who are you writing this for? What do they want or need to know?
- **Do Initial Research** – Write an overview of what you want to present.
- **Outline** – Develop an overall plan. Use an idea diagram or a mind map.
- **Research** – Use the resources.
- **Write the First Draft** – Review your work. Have someone critique it.
- **Revise and Complete the Final Draft** – Cut, paste, check (and correct) spelling, prepare printouts, and proof the paper.
- **Admire Your Work**



## Chapter 2: Alphabetic Letters, Numerals, Clock Times, and Dates

### Alphabetic Letters and Numerals

Phonetic alphabet refers to a system of associating a specific word with each letter of the alphabet. Phonetic alphabets are used in radio broadcasting and voice communications to promote consistency among personnel and minimize errors in the understanding of verbal messages. Using the phonetic alphabet, people can convey without ambiguity letters that are easy to misinterpret on the phone. In this way, “Sierra” and “Fox trot” are much easier to distinguish than S and F, which tend to sound alike over the telephone or radio. It is also more effective to convey difficult names with the phonetic alphabet. Also, the string of individual letters or numbers (alphanumeric code) which make up a *model number, part number, vehicle identification number or serial number* can be more accurately transmitted via radio or telephone through the use of a phonetic alphabet translation.

The I.T.U. (International Telecommunications Union) Phonetic Alphabet or International Phonetic Alphabet, is the system most commonly used in Canada.

***I.T.U. Phonetic Alphabet***

- A** – ALPHA ..... (*al-fah*)
- B** – BRAVO ..... (*brah-vo*)
- C** – CHARLIE ..... (*char-lee*)
- D** – DELTA ..... (*dell-ta*)
- E** – ECHO ..... (*eck-oh*)
- F** – FOX TROT ..... (*foks-trot*)
- G** – GOLF ..... (*golf*)
- H** – HOTEL ..... (*hoe-tell*)
- I** – INDIA ..... (*in-dee-ah*)
- J** – JULIET ..... (*jew-lee-ett*)
- K** – KILO ..... (*kee-low*)
- L** – LIMA ..... (*lee-mah*)
- M** – MIKE ..... (*mike*)
- N** – NOVEMBER ..... (*no-vem-bur*)
- O** – OSCAR ..... (*oss-car*)
- P** – PAPA ..... (*pah-pah*)
- Q** – QUEBEC ..... (*kee-beck*)
- R** – ROMEO ..... (*row-me-oh*)
- S** – SIERRA ..... (*see-air-rah*)
- T** – TANGO ..... (*tang-go*)
- U** – UNIFORM ..... (*you-nee-form*)
- V** – VICTOR ..... (*vik-tar*)
- W** – WHISKEY ..... (*wis-key*)
- X** – X-RAY ..... (*ecks-ray*)
- Y** – YANKEE ..... (*yang-key*)
- Z** – ZULU ..... (*zoo-loo*)

It is important to use this system as printed and not substitute alternate words. You must become so familiar with the system your agency uses

that you begin to *think* in terms of the phonetic alphabet instead of individual letters or numbers.

It is common practice when broadcasting or speaking over the telephone, to first state the common pronunciation of the word, followed by the spelling of it using the phonetic alphabet. For example you would say, “The surname is *Smith*, spelled: Sierra, Mike, India, Tango, Hotel.” *Never* repeat the letter followed by the phonetic such as “S-Sierra, M-Mike, I-India, T-Tango, H-Hotel.” It does not flow, and becomes confusing to the person listening or trying to copy (“Is it ‘Smith’ or ‘Ssmmiitthh’ or something else altogether?”). If you are unable to pronounce a name, state the other name and then, “Last name I spell...november, golf, uniform, yankee, echo, november” [NGUYEN].

With practice, you will be able to *think* in terms of the phonetic alphabet.

### ***Transmission of Numbers***

Numbers zero through nine should be pronounced as follows:

- 0 .....(*zee-ro*)
- 1 .....(*wun*)
- 2 .....(*too*)
- 3 .....(*thu-ree*)
- 4 .....(*fu-or*)
- 5 .....(*fa-ive*)
- 6 .....(*siks*)
- 7 .....(*sev-ven*)
- 8 .....(*ate*)
- 9 .....(*nie-yen*)

(or *NIN-er* as per the Industry Canada Study Guide for Radiotelephone Operator’s Restricted Certificate – Aeronautical)

Use *Zero* instead of *Oh*, which is ambiguous.

Always enunciate clearly and do not group numbers together. All numbers except whole thousands should be transmitted by pronouncing each digit separately. Whole thousands should be transmitted by



pronouncing each digit in the number of thousands followed by the word “thousand”.

*Examples:*

- 10 becomes..... one zero
- 75 becomes..... seven five
- 100 becomes..... one zero zero
- 5,800 becomes..... five eight zero zero
- 11,000 becomes..... one one thousand
- 68.009 becomes..... six eight zero zero nine

*A street address would be stated as follows:*

“One four zero zero Barga Drive, bravo, alpha, romeo, golf, echo, november.” (1400 Barga Drive)

*Broadcast vehicle plates as follow:*

“Bravo Four, suspect vehicle is a late-model, four-door Jeep, red in color. BCL: whiskey, charlie, x-ray, one, seven, three” (WCX173).

When broadcasting alphanumeric information, state each numeric carefully with each alpha character followed immediately by its phonetic word.

*For example, to broadcast “1B2G36T4”, state:*

“One, Bravo, two, Golf, three, six, Tango, four.” Each number and letter is pronounced separately, in other words you would not say “One, B-Bravo, two, G-Golf, *thirty six*, T-Tango, four.”

Numbers containing a decimal point shall be transmitted as above, with the decimal point indicated by the word “decimal”.

*Example:*

121.5 becomes one two one decimal five

Monetary denominations, when transmitted with groups of digits, should be transmitted in the sequence in which they are written.

*Examples:*

\$17.25 becomes .... dollars one seven decimal two five

75 becomes ..... seven five cents

## Use of 24-Hour Clock or Military Time

All times used in dispatching and in writing reports will be given in military time. This is also referred to as the *twenty-four hour clock system*. Public safety communicators commonly use the 24-hour-clock for dispatching and writing reports. This minimizes errors in reporting, and removes the need to add “a.m.” or “p.m.” after the time.

Midnight is both the starting and ending point on a twenty-four hour clock. Time measurements are displayed as four digit numbers.

Midnight is referred to as 2400 (twenty four hundred hours), but one minute after is 0001 hours (zero, zero, zero, one hours). The two rightmost digits register *minutes* (00 to 59), while the two leftmost digits register *hours* (00 to 24). For example, 3:15 a.m. is 0315 hours (pronounced “zero three fifteen”), 2 p.m. is 1400 hours (pronounced “fourteen hundred hours”), and 7:25 p.m. is 1925 hours (pronounced “nineteen twenty five hours”).

Like the phonetic alphabet, military time is used for consistency and to minimize errors during radio transmissions and in written reports. In order to become an efficient call taker, you must be thoroughly familiar with this system of time keeping and learn to think about the passage of time in terms of a twenty-four hour cycle rather than a twelve hour one.

The quickest and easiest way to learn this system is to set your watch to military time and use it every day.

The following is a list of military times, including a few examples using minutes:

<b>Standard Time</b>	<b>Military Time</b>
1:00 a.m.....	0100 hours..... ( <i>zero one hundred hours</i> )
1:20 a.m.....	0120 hours..... ( <i>zero one two zero hours</i> )
2:00 a.m.....	0200 hours..... ( <i>zero two hundred hours</i> )
3:00 a.m.....	0300 hours..... ( <i>zero three hundred hours</i> )
4:00 a.m.....	0400 hours..... ( <i>zero four hundred hours</i> )
5:00 a.m.....	0500 hours..... ( <i>zero five hundred hours</i> )
6:00 a.m.....	0600 hours..... ( <i>zero six hundred hours</i> )
6:15 a.m.....	0615 hours..... ( <i>zero six one five hours</i> )
7:00 a.m.....	0700 hours..... ( <i>zero seven hundred hours</i> )
8:00 a.m.....	0800 hours..... ( <i>zero eight hundred hours</i> )
9:00 a.m.....	0900 hours..... ( <i>zero nine hundred hours</i> )
10:00 a.m.....	1000 hours..... ( <i>ten hundred hours</i> )
11:00 a.m.....	1100 hours..... ( <i>eleven hundred hours</i> )
12:00 p.m. ....	1200 hours..... ( <i>twelve hundred hours</i> )
1:00 p.m. ....	1300 hours..... ( <i>thirteen hundred hours</i> )
1:45 p.m. ....	1345 hours..... ( <i>thirteen forty five hours</i> )
2:00 p.m. ....	1400 hours..... ( <i>fourteen hundred hours</i> )
3:00 p.m. ....	1500 hours..... ( <i>fifteen hundred hours</i> )
4:00 p.m. ....	1600 hours..... ( <i>sixteen hundred hours</i> )
5:00 p.m. ....	1700 hours..... ( <i>seventeen hundred hours</i> )
6:00 p.m. ....	1800 hours..... ( <i>eighteen hundred hours</i> )
6:30 p.m. ....	1830 hours..... ( <i>eighteen thirty hours</i> )
7:00 p.m. ....	1900 hours..... ( <i>nineteen hundred hours</i> )
8:00 p.m. ....	2000 hours..... ( <i>twenty hundred hours</i> )
9:00 p.m. ....	2100 hours..... ( <i>twenty-one hundred hours</i> )
10:00 p.m. ....	2200 hours..... ( <i>twenty-two hundred hours</i> )
11:00 p.m. ....	2300 hours..... ( <i>twenty-three hundred hours</i> )
12:00 midnight .....	2400 hours ..... ( <i>twenty-four hundred hours</i> )

## Calendar Dates

Three calendar date formats are used in automated systems and in report writing. The most common format is year, month, day (YYMMDD). December 14th 2012 would be written as follows: 121214. The second system is month, day, year (MMDDYY). December 14th 2012 would be written as: 121409. These numeric systems use two digits to represent the year, the month and the day. The last two digits of a year (“2012”) are used in this system. For example, “00” would indicate the year 2000, unless it was a date of birth. It is always wise to check what format the person is referring to. You can tell the day and the month apart if the number for the day is 13 or higher: 09-12-21 is self-explanatory. But what about 02-03-04? The situation may be harder to decipher for dates in the first thirty-one years of the twenty-first century.

The third system, used in the Ontario PARIS system and the Ontario Municipal Provincial Police Automated Centre, is DDMMYY with the month abbreviated in three letters. December 14, 2012 would be written as: 14DEC12. The agency where you work will specify which system to use.

## Metric and Imperial Measures

The universal system of measure is the *metric system*. However, a majority of callers will probably supply measurements in *imperial* units (feet, pounds, miles, and so on). Hence, you should always have a conversion chart handy for quick comparisons. You will not necessarily have to memorize these conversion charts, but you should be familiar with the general process.

Many communicators still *broadcast* using the imperial system but, in Canada, all *reports* must now be written using the metric system.

**Height Conversion Table**

*NOTE: To convert height above or below the table, multiply the feet by 12 to get the total number of inches, add up the inches and multiply by 2.54, or divide the cm by 2.54.*

<b>FT- IN</b>	<b>CM</b>	<b>FT- IN</b>	<b>CM</b>
4-11 .....	150	5-11 .....	180
4-11 1/2 .....	151	5-11 1/2 .....	182
5 - 0.....	152	6 - 0.....	183
5 - 0 1/2.....	153	6 - 0 1/2.....	184
5 - 1.....	154	6 - 1.....	185
5 - 1 1/2.....	155	6 - 1 1/2.....	187
5 - 2.....	157	6 - 2.....	188
5 - 2 1/2.....	159	6 - 2 ½.....	189
5 - 3.....	160	6 - 3.....	191
5 - 3 1/2.....	161	6 - 3 1/2.....	192
5 - 4.....	163	6 - 4.....	193
5 - 4 1/2.....	164	6 - 4 1/2.....	194
5 - 5.....	165	6 - 5.....	196
5 - 5 1/2.....	166	6 - 5 1/2.....	197
5 - 6.....	168	6 - 6.....	198
5 - 6 1/2.....	169	6 - 6 1/2.....	199
5 - 7.....	170	6 - 7.....	201
5 - 7 1/2.....	171	6 - 7 1/2.....	202
5 - 8.....	173	6 - 8.....	203
5 - 8 1/2.....	174	6 - 8 1/2.....	204
5 - 9.....	175	6 - 9.....	206
5 - 9 1/2.....	177	6 - 9 1/2.....	207
5-10 .....	178	6-10 .....	208
5-10 1/2 .....	179	6-10 1/2 .....	210

**Weight Conversion Table**

*NOTE: Convert weight above or below the table amounts by multiplying the kg by 2.2 or dividing the pounds (lb.) by 2.2.*

<b>KG.</b>	<b>LB</b>	<b>KG</b>	<b>LB</b>	<b>KG</b>	<b>LB.</b>
43.....	95	63.....	139	83.....	183
44.....	96	64.....	140	83.....	184
44.....	97	64.....	141	84.....	185
44.....	98	64.....	142	84.....	186
45.....	99	65.....	143	85.....	187
45.....	100	65.....	144	85.....	188
46.....	101	66.....	145	86.....	189
46.....	102	66.....	146	86.....	190
47.....	103	67.....	147	87.....	191
47.....	104	67.....	148	87.....	192
48.....	105	68.....	149	88.....	193
48.....	106	68.....	150	88.....	194
49.....	107	68.....	151	88.....	195
49.....	108	69.....	152	89.....	196
49.....	109	69.....	153	89.....	197
50.....	110	70.....	154	90.....	198
50.....	111	70.....	155	90.....	199
51.....	112	71.....	156	91.....	200
51.....	113	71.....	157	91.....	201
52.....	114	72.....	158	92.....	202
52.....	115	72.....	159	92.....	203
53.....	116	73.....	160	93.....	204
53.....	117	73.....	161	93.....	205
54.....	118	73.....	162	93.....	206
54.....	119	74.....	163	94.....	207
54.....	120	74.....	164	94.....	208
55.....	121	75.....	165	95.....	209
55.....	122	75.....	166	95.....	210
56.....	123	76.....	167	96.....	211
56.....	124	76.....	168	96.....	212
57.....	125	77.....	169	97.....	213
57.....	126	77.....	170	97.....	214
58.....	127	78.....	171	98.....	215
58.....	128	78.....	172	98.....	216
59.....	129	78.....	173	98.....	217
59.....	130	79.....	174	99.....	218
59.....	131	79.....	175	99.....	219
60.....	132	80.....	176	100.....	220
60.....	133	80.....	177	100.....	221
61.....	134	81.....	178	101.....	222
61.....	135	81.....	179	101.....	223
62.....	136	82.....	180	102.....	224
62.....	137	82.....	181	102.....	225
63.....	138	83.....	182	103.....	226



## Chapter 3: Organizations Used for Referrals and Information Requests

Working in a public safety communications centre, you must be aware of a host of government agencies and private companies that you can contact for particular services or equipment as required. Many of the calls that you receive will have nothing to do with police, fire or ambulance. Callers will ask you what they should do in a number of situations. Communications centres have extensive contact or call-out lists that identify other agencies and the help they can provide.

One such reference book is the *Red Book* of information services for an area. In some areas, people call it a *Green Book*, a *contact list*, or a *call-out*. Books that are formally published for this purpose normally list a number of agencies followed by a short synopsis of their services, an address and a telephone number. Many contact lists are compiled in the aftermath of major emergencies, when the need for certain information has been identified.

***NOTE: The following lists should not be construed as being complete, or in any way applicable to a particular province, territory, regional district, county, or municipality. They are intended only as rough outlines for the types of agencies that public safety communications operations may wish to have on their contact list. Refer to local and other listings appropriate to the location and agency that you represent.***

### **Federal Agencies**

The following are examples of federal agencies referred to by communications operators:

#### ***Canada/US Customs***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency, on behalf of operational personnel, to ascertain the international movements of people, or to alert the appropriate authorities to be on the lookout for individuals or vehicles that may be attempting to cross an international boundary. On certain occasions, people will *run* a border crossing



either on foot or by vehicle, which results in a traffic or person alert and would involve authorities on both sides of the border. Often, Immigration also works with Customs to monitor the movement of persons.

### ***Citizenship and Immigration Canada***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency, on behalf of a police officer, to determine if a passport or proof of citizenship was valid.

In its offices across Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada:

- Examines immigrants, visitors and people claiming refugee status at land borders, seaports and airports;
- Processes applications for permanent residence, extensions of visitor status and sponsorships for relatives overseas and refugees;
- Admits students, temporary workers and qualified business immigrants;
- Investigates and removes people who are in Canada illegally; works with and helps fund a network of settlement agencies and services that assist immigrants in adapting to and participating in day-to-day Canadian life;
- Promotes the acceptance of immigrants by Canadians; cooperates with other levels of government on enforcement, program development and the delivery of services;
- Accepts applications and verifies the eligibility and documentation of each applicant;
- Grants citizenship and administers the Oath of Citizenship at ceremonies in Citizenship Courts and numerous community facilities across Canada;
- Confirms Canadian citizenship status; and
- Issues proofs of citizenship to Canadians.

### ***Correctional Services Canada***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency, on behalf of operational personnel, to ascertain the status of an individual who has been involved in the corrections system. Issues such as status, parole and other matters are the responsibility of Correctional Services.

Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) administers the sentences of offenders sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more. As part of the criminal justice system, it contributes to the protection of society by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control.

### ***CANUTEC***

CANUTEC is the Canadian Transport Emergency Centre and is operated by the Transport Dangerous Goods Directorate of Transport Canada. CANUTEC provides a national, bilingual (English and French) advisory service and is staffed by professional chemists, who are experienced and trained in interpreting technical information and providing emergency response advice.

Any person who has the charge, management or control of dangerous goods at the time of a dangerous occurrence must immediately notify the appropriate provincial authority; the appropriate federal authority specified for each of marine, rail and air; the owner, lessee or charterer in the case of a road vehicle; his or her employer; and the owner or consignor of the consignment. In any emergency that involves dangerous goods, CANUTEC can be contacted by call collect at: (613) 996-6666 (24 hours). In addition, a written Dangerous Occurrence report must be sent to the Transport Dangerous Goods Directorate (Ottawa) within 30 days of any accident.

### ***Transport Canada***

This Department is responsible for the regulation and administration of transportation policies and programs, in particular the *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act*.

The *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act* and *Regulations* cover the handling, offering for transport and transporting of dangerous goods. The purpose of this legislation is to promote public safety.

A cooperative effort by the federal and provincial governments, in consultation with industry, has resulted in uniform requirements applying to all modes of transport – rail, air, road and marine.

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency to obtain information on airports, air traffic services, aviation, flight plan filing, harbours and ports, railway safety and the transportation of hazardous goods. Transport Canada's current mission is to provide for a safe, environmentally-sound national transportation system consistent with a competitive economy and the achievement of Canada's goals. For example, if a request is made from the field concerning an overdue aircraft, Transport Canada could provide information concerning flight plans, the last time the aircraft was contacted, and so on. Queries concerning the regulations of transporting hazardous goods would be directed to Transport Canada.

### ***Public Safety Canada***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency to seek information and assistance when dealing with issues concerning preparedness for harmful emergencies.

Emergency preparedness within the federal government is based on the coordinated efforts of all federal departments and agencies, under the guidance and stimulus of Emergency Preparedness Canada, to further the following aims:

- Secure and preserve the well-being of people in Canada, their property and the environment from the harmful effects of emergencies;
- Provide leadership in working toward improved emergency planning and preparedness in Canada;
- Develop a credible national capability to meet emergencies of all types; and

- Work closely and cooperatively with the provinces and territories to develop adequate and reasonably uniform standards of emergency services across Canada.

### ***Office of the Director General of Fire Prevention***

Recently the responsibility for the Fire Commissioner of Canada was transferred from the Department of Public Works to the Department of Labour. Consequently this office underwent a name change – it is now called the Office of the Director General of Fire Prevention and Fire Commissioner of Canada. However, it may be more familiar to you by a former name, the Dominion Fire Commissioner (DFC) by which it was known for many years.

The Director General of Fire Prevention acts as the watchdog for federal departments on National Fire Code standards and regulations, and with a staff of 60-70 people, maintains regional offices across Canada as well as a head office in Ottawa. The major activities of these offices include the following:

- Review of fire plans
- Conducting of inspections
- Fire cause determination within federal jurisdiction
- Provision of fire loss statistics
- Training of federal employees in emergency procedures such as building fire evacuations or first aid
- Operation and training of fire suppression crews in specific areas

Inspection and maintenance of fire safety standards in all federally owned buildings such as:

- Post offices
- Penitentiaries
- Hotels operated within Parks Canada boundaries
- Agriculture Canada test farms
- Federal airports

- Federally supported First Nations schools
- RCMP stations

As a matter of policy, the Director General of Fire Prevention abides by the fire code regulations in effect in each province. However, this policy decision is not legally binding. In other words, the Director General of Fire Prevention has a legal right to override provincially-established fire regulations in areas of federal jurisdiction.

In B.C., the Director General of Fire Prevention abides by the *B.C. Fire Code Regulation*. For instance, at Canada Place, the Director General has fire and security officers who monitor the complex according to British Columbia fire code regulations.

Because authority in federal jurisdictions has some grey areas that may seem ambiguous, fire department personnel should be discreet in exercising their authority. An officer doing a company pre-fire plan tour, for example, can expect to be welcomed by the Director General's staff. However, in the case of a fire prevention inspection, the Director General's officers would consider it their responsibility and would not welcome assistance unless it was requested. Another point to note is that inspection notices issued by a fire department will automatically be referred to the Director General's office for follow-up. On-site federal fire officers will not act on a notice unless it is issued by the Director General's office.

Despite these grey areas of jurisdiction, local fire departments are generally able to co-operate easily with the Director General of Fire Prevention to ensure that fire prevention programs operate smoothly in their communities.

### ***National Defence***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency, on behalf of operational personnel, to request assistance on operational matters, report large-scale disasters or emergency incidents. Canadian Forces Base personnel may be of assistance in certain operational situations such as large-scale searches, or securing the scene of a crash, and so on. Also, CFB personnel may be able to assist in providing services such as

armed personnel carriers, emergency operating rooms, food and accommodations.

### ***Canadian Coast Guard***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency for assistance for several purposes, the most common being assistance in search and rescue. The Canadian Coast Guard is responsible for search and rescue operations on the east and west coasts of Canada. Operators may also require the assistance of this agency for requesting the services of a Hovercraft, the issuing or verification of marine pollution-incident alerts and marine weather information. In the case of locating vessels, the Canadian Coast Guard also provides information on vessel movement.

### ***Fisheries and Oceans Canada***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency, on behalf of operational personnel or the public, to obtain information or assist in the reporting of violations concerning sport, commercial, or native fisheries.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to all issues pertaining to Canada's ocean boundary and the conservation and protection of resources within that boundary. Its duties include responsibility for marine and inland fisheries; fishing and recreational harbours; hydrography and marine sciences; and policy and program coordination of the Government of Canada respecting oceans.

### ***Environment Canada (Environmental Protection Service)***

One of the responsibilities of this agency is the protection and conservation of the quality of the natural environment. This includes water, soil and air and the conservation of renewable water, land and wildlife resources. An important department of this agency is the Environmental Protection Service. The main contribution of the EPS is valuable research information contained in a series of manuals called *Technical Information for Problem Spills (TIPS)*. Each TIPS provides details on how best to deal with incidents involving a specific product.

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency to obtain information concerning the natural environment. Environment Canada's mandate is to protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment and to provide services that deal with weather service, air pollution control, water management and various other services. Environment Canada provides predictions and warnings in the form of weather forecasts, pollution indexes, wind-chill readings and an ultraviolet ray index.

### ***Natural Resources Canada***

Explosives and fireworks are regulated by this department. Individuals wishing to supervise public fireworks displays are referred to the department to apply for a Fireworks Supervisor Certificate.

Fire service personnel who have the certificate may be present at most public celebrations.

### ***Human Resources Development Canada – Labour Program***

This department's mandate is to promote stable labour relations. One way it meets this objective is to establish conditions of employment that maintain occupational safety and health. The vehicle for this is the *Labour Code of Canada*. This code covers fire regulations in federal works and undertakings, among other things.

The department also enforces safety standards in all buildings involved in inter-provincial or international trade (for example, banks, radio and television stations, airlines, buses, trucking, grain, railroads, flour mills and telecommunication companies).

The Department of Labour reviews plans of these facilities to ensure they comply with Labour Code Standards and inspects the buildings on a regular basis. All plans for occupancies under their jurisdiction have to comply with local or provincial requirements.

### ***Canada Labour Relations Board***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency to resolve employer issues. The Canada Labour Relations Board was established in its present form in 1972 as a quasi-judicial body with statutory and regulatory powers pertaining to the administration of Part I of the

Canada Labour Code. Part I of the Canada Labour Code charges the Board with a twofold responsibility: that of granting, modifying and terminating bargaining rights and that of resolving, through mediation or adjudication, complaints of unfair labour practices concerning violations of the Code by trade unions or employers.

### ***Health Canada***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency for matters concerning a variety of personal and public health issues. The mission of Health Canada is to help the people of Canada maintain and improve their health.

### ***National Research Council Canada***

The purpose of the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) is to coordinate and promote scientific research in Canada. It was established by an Act of Parliament in 1916. Initially the NRC had a staff of 300, and offered a modest program of research grants and scholarships. During World War II, the NRC expanded and diversified its interests. Today, with a staff of 3300, the NRC promotes research in many areas, including:

- Biological systems and processes
- The performance of machines and mechanical structures
- Control systems and automated processes
- Properties, uses and processing of materials
- Standards and methods of measurement
- The design, construction and performance of buildings and engineering works

In addition, over 1000 representatives from government, universities and industry contribute their time to associate and advisory committees that provide advice and support to the NRC.

In 1948 an Associate Committee was established to encourage the uniformity of building regulations across Canada. To achieve its goal, the Committee develops and maintains the *National Building Code*, which it offers to provincial legislative authorities for adoption. The



*National Building Code* is a set of building regulations ensuring minimum standards for public health, safety and fire protection. It is closely co-ordinated with the *National Fire Code*.

The Associate Committee on the *National Fire Code* was formed in 1956 to foster uniformity of local fire prevention and fire protection measures throughout Canada. To this end, the Committee develops and publishes *The National Fire Code of Canada* (NFC), which contains a model set of technical requirements designed to provide a minimum standard of fire prevention within the community. In British Columbia, this code was adopted as a regulation under the authority of the *Fire Services Act* and was renamed the *British Columbia Fire Code Regulation*.

### ***RCMP Public Complaints Commission***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency for information on public complaints. They may even contact this organization to initiate their own complaint. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Public Complaints Commission is an independent administrative tribunal empowered to conduct external and independent reviews of public complaints concerning the conduct of members of the RCMP in the course of their duties.

## **Provincial Ministries/Agencies**

The following are examples of provincial ministries/agencies referred to by communications operators:

### ***Attorney General***

This Ministry is responsible for the administration of justice in the province, the enforcement of federal and provincial statutes that protect persons and property, and the provision of legal services to the provincial government, including the fire service. With this latter function in mind, the following is an overview of two authorities: Crown Counsel, and the Inspection and Standards Branch (Corrections).

### ***Crown Counsel and the Inspection and Standards Branch (Corrections)***

Two authorities under the Ministry of the Attorney General have a bearing on emergency services, such as the fire service. They are:

- Crown Counsel
- Inspection and Standards Branch, Corrections

The Crown Counsel provides services, such as the laying of charges against individuals or companies and prosecuting offences to municipal bylaws or provincial regulations such as arson.

The local police would also be involved when a criminal charge such as arson is involved. In an arson case, police investigate who wilfully set the fire and turn the evidence over to Crown Counsel. Crown Counsel decides whether to proceed. If Crown Counsel decides to prosecute, fire service personnel may be called as expert witnesses.

When a violation has not been rectified within the given time period and a charge can be laid, the charge is handled by Crown Counsel.

The Inspection and Standards Branch (Corrections) is responsible for fire safety matters in all provincial correctional centres. They inspect their facilities for fire hazards and train their staff to handle fire and other emergencies.

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency for a wide variety of services. Some of the departments associated with this ministry are:

- Council of Human Rights – queries regarding human rights violations
- Police Commission – queries regarding police issues
- Provincial Firearms Commissioner – queries regarding firearms
- Coroner’s Service – coroner’s inquests, names and locations of coroners, and the like.
- Corrections Branch:
  - Youth Custody Centres
  - Women’s Custody Centres
  - Family Justice Centres
  - Probation and Family Court
- Coordinated Law Enforcement Unit – queries regarding major crimes involving more than one jurisdiction
- Court Services – all provincial court matters
- Criminal Injury – compensation for victims of crime
- Liquor Control and Licensing – all queries concerning controls and licenses
- Police Services – queries concerning the provision of police services throughout the province
- Public Safety and Regulatory Branch
- Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) – all matters involving emergency planning throughout the province
- Sheriff’s/Bailiff’s – transport of persons in custody, serving of subpoenas, and so on.
- Small Claims Court – civil claims
- Superior Courts – criminal court

### ***Social Services***

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency to obtain information on the services available to the people of the province with special requirements. Such special services might consist of Income Support (welfare); Child, Family & Community Services; Adolescent Services; and Handicapped Services.

### ***Health & Ministry Responsible for Seniors***

This ministry has three areas of fire safety responsibility:

- **Hospital Planning:** For new and existing hospital buildings, ministry personnel work with the local fire department and/or the Office of the Fire Commissioner to ensure a minimum degree of life safety.
- **Emergency Health Services (Ambulance)**
  - EHS also may contract fire departments to provide first response services
  - Fire departments often work with EHS to care for victims

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency to obtain emergency medical services. The BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) is the main provider of emergency paramedical services in British Columbia. Services such as Advanced Life Support (ALS), infant transport, and air ambulance are provided by BCAS. This agency has three communications centres in BC, in Vancouver, Victoria and Kamloops. BCAS is equipped to deal with large-scale emergencies, as well as providing a versatile bicycle paramedic service for large events and access to areas not easily reached by conventional means.

- **Community Care Facilities:** These facilities usually fall within the general day-to-day jurisdiction of the local Fire Prevention Officer. These facilities include day-care centres, and senior and extended care facilities.

Public safety communicators would refer to the agencies in this ministry to obtain information on health issues. The mission of British Columbia's health system is to promote and provide for the physical, mental and social well-being of all British Columbians. The Ministry of

Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors provides management and leadership of the health care system on behalf of the provincial government.

### ***Municipal Affairs and Housing***

The purpose of this ministry is to act as the main instrument for implementing provincial policies concerning local government. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has a major role in fire prevention and other safety because it is responsible for:

- *Provincial Building Regulations*
- *The Building Code Appeal Board*
- *The Building Safety Standards Act*
- *The Electrical Safety Act and Regulations*
- *The Elevating Devices Safety Act and Regulations*
- *The Fire Services Act and Regulations*
- *The Gas Safety Act and Regulations*
- *The Municipal Act*
- *The Power Engineers and Boiler and Pressure Vessel Safety Act and Regulations*

*The Municipal Act* affects company officers because it is the provincial legislation that gives municipalities the authority to create a fire department. It should be noted that some cities have their own charter for this purpose and therefore is not governed by the provincial *Municipal Act*.

Of interest is the Safety Engineering Services Division, which is responsible for inspecting electrical, gas, boilers, elevating devices and occupational environment.

It is important to know that fire service personnel are not the authority in these areas. Problems in these areas are referred to the Safety Engineering Services Division. Each fire department will have its own protocol on how it passes a request for assistance through the chain.

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency to obtain information on the Fire Commissioner, any fire department operating in the province, or any other information dealing with municipal affairs.

### ***Transportation and Highways***

This ministry's jurisdiction covers:

- The Transport of Dangerous Goods Act
- The Motor Carrier Act
- *The Motor Vehicle Act*, which regulates the licensing and operation of emergency vehicles

Public safety communicators would refer to this agency to obtain information on anything to do with the highway system in the province. Referrals from the public requesting road conditions would be made to a toll-free number operated by this agency. Information regarding weigh scales and special permits would come from this agency.

### ***Environment, Lands and Parks***

Public safety communicators would refer to agencies in this ministry to obtain information on matters involving conservation and in particular, *conservation officers*. Some of the areas involving the environment include:

- Air (air quality, car emissions, climate change, smoke control);
- Land (parks, crown land, wildlife, managing waste, land stewardship, protecting habitats, managing pesticides, preventing pollution, reporting forest fires, and so on.); and
- Water (water stewardship, water quality, watershed management, water licenses, fisheries, and so on).

### ***Forests***

One of this ministry's mandates is to manage, protect and conserve the forests and range resources of the Crown. Therefore, the ministry is responsible for fire safety and suppression in forested areas as well as any alpine park land.

In cases when fire on crown lands may endanger a bordering community or when fire originating in a city threatens crown lands, communication with the municipal fire department regarding mutual aid may fall into place. However, a fire protection agreement between the fire department and the forest service would have to be in effect.

### ***Finance and Corporate Relations***

The central mandate of the ministry is to protect the public in the marketplace. This ministry is responsible for the legislation of consumer products and advertising practices. It would get involved if there was a product on the market that posed a potential fire hazard.

### ***Small Business, Tourism and Culture***

Public safety communicators would refer to the agencies in this ministry to obtain information on the activities of small businesses (licensed, ownership, and so on), any information regarding tourism in the province, the location of government agents, and so on.

### ***Independent Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Crown Corporations***

Some provincial crown corporations are also involved in fire safety and may add their own regulations to buildings under their control. As a matter of policy they also abide by provincial fire code regulations. Here are some examples:

#### **BC Buildings Corporation**

The BC Buildings Corporation is the landlord for the provincial government. It has a department for fire safety, which is responsible for the safety in buildings owned, leased or occupied by the provincial government. Local fire authorities may still carry out inspections of these buildings and cooperate with B.C. Building Corporation personnel to ensure fire safety standards are met.

#### **BC Ferries Corporation**

The BC Ferries Corporation provides its own fire safety regulations on its properties but must comply with fire regulations as encoded in the *Canada Shipping Act*. Although the B.C. Ferries Corporation does not

have a blanket exemption, as an agent of the Crown it is not required to abide by provincial regulations.

Public safety communicators would refer to this crown corporation for information concerning the arrival or departure of ferry vessels. For example, if a suspected impaired driver or suspicious vehicle or persons were reported, it would be necessary to know arrival times, and so on. B.C. Ferries serves forty-two ports of call on twenty-four routes throughout coastal British Columbia.

### **Public Utilities**

Public safety communicators would refer to these crown corporations for information concerning operational incidents requiring the emergency services for utilities.

### **Hydro**

Hydro has its own fire safety staff and enforces its own regulations in-house. For example, under the *B.C. Hydro and Power Authority Act*, it is not obliged to abide by provincial fire regulations. However, B.C. Hydro's policy is to recognize and abide by them. This policy also applies to local municipal bylaws. Where a discrepancy occurs, B.C. Hydro will negotiate a mutually acceptable resolution. Public safety communicators would refer to this corporation to obtain information on hydroelectric emergency services. British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority is a provincial crown corporation.

### **Insurance Corporation of BC**

ICBC provides insurance to schools that must comply with specified fire safety standards in order to obtain coverage. The specified fire safety standards may be in addition to *BC Fire Code Regulations* requirements.

### **Municipalities**

Under the *BC Municipal Act*, municipalities are responsible for fire suppression within their borders. A Municipal Council may, under Section 699 of the *Municipal Act*, pass a bylaw to:

- Establish a fire department (volunteer, paid or a combination of the two)



- Appoint, control and regulate a Fire Chief and members of the department
- Accept and hold property for use by the fire department
- Make building and equipment agreements for the furnishing of fire protection

The Municipality may also pay or collect payment for fire protection. These powers are authorized by Section 699 of the Municipal Act but are not subject to the *Fire Services Act*.

Section 700 of the *Municipal Act*, which deals with fire regulations for protection of persons and property, permits the municipal council to:

- Regulate conduct or persons at or near fires
- Regulate dangerous substances
- Require disposal of debris caused by lumbering, land clearing or industrial operation
- Regulate handling of flammable liquids
- Regulate the use of open fires
- Keep people from blocking fire exits
- Require fire hazards on a property to be dealt with appropriately
- Authorize fire inspections, fire fighting and the issue of burning permits

Municipalities often draw up a bylaw for fire protection. A bylaw enables funding for the fire department to flow from the municipality. The bylaws set out the fire protection regulations for the district or municipality.

These bylaws usually work in accordance with the *Fire Services Act* and state the rights and responsibilities of fire department personnel and the public in the municipality or district. A typical bylaw may have wording similar to the following examples:

No person shall light, fuel or make use of a fire within the Fire Protection District during the period or periods of time referred to in

paragraph 8 below without first obtaining from the Fire Chief or designated deputy a valid burning permit.

The Fire Chief or any person under his authority may enter into or upon any lands, premises, gardens and buildings for the purpose of carrying out or enforcing the provisions of this bylaw, and any person who interferes with, obstructs, prevents, or attempts to interfere with, obstruct or prevent or any way refuses to admit the Fire Chief, or any person under his authority, into or upon any lands, premises, garden or building or who refuses to furnish any information at the request of the Fire Chief, or any person under his authority, in connection therewith, and in his lawful duties in enforcing this bylaw, shall be deemed to be guilty of an infraction of this bylaw, and liable to the penalties herein provided.

### ***Municipal Agencies***

The following are examples of municipal agencies that communicators may refer to.

- Business licenses – validity or existence of business licenses.
- Bylaws – enforcement of laws that pertain to a specific municipality.
- Pet licenses – domestic pet license inquiries.
- Engineering department – problems with water mains, sewage, traffic lights, environmental situations, and so on.
- Fire departments – fire, extrications, rescues, environmental situations, and so on.
- Sanitation/garbage collection – regulations concerning dumping, collection of waste, and so on.
- Health department – clinics, nurse services, and so on.
- Parks and Recreation – all municipal parks, recreation facilities (pools, playgrounds, arenas, and so on).
- Permits – building, moving, dumping, burning, demolition, parades, special events, and so on.

- Police departments – examples of, enforcement of federal, provincial and municipal laws.
- Victim services – volunteer assistance organization operated under the police departments' guidance.
- Youth services – services for young people often operated under Parks and Recreation (day camps, playground activities, and so on).
- Pounds, animal shelters, the S.P.C.A. – stray pets, injured pets, euthanasia services.
- School board – information on school activities, hours of operation, contact information for faculty and students.
- Street lighting and traffic signals – see Engineering
- Waterworks emergencies – see Engineering

## **Other Agencies**

### ***Association of Canadian Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners (ACFM/FC)***

This is an association of all provincial Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners including the Department of National Defence and Fire Commissioner of Canada, which meets yearly. Provincial fire safety problems are tabled and common problems are channelled through the president for action, that is, inclusion in the *National Building Code* or the *National Fire Code*.

### ***Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP)***

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police was founded in Toronto in 1905. The Association is dedicated to the support and promotion of efficient law enforcement and to the protection and security of the people of Canada.

### ***Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC)***

This is a Canada-wide association that meets in conference annually. It distributes educational materials and is an excellent source of information on the administration and operations of fire departments. It

may be used as an information exchange and source for fire prevention promotional material. Its head office is located in Ottawa.

***Canadian Gas Association (CGA)***

This Canadian equivalent to the United States American Gas Association is responsible for the approval and certification of gas-fired appliances and related equipment.

***Canadian Standards Association (CSA)***

This is a non-profit organization incorporated to provide a national standards body in Canada. The head office is in Etobicoke, Ontario. The CSA also has an office in Ottawa.

It conducts the examination, testing and inspection service for electrical and oil burning equipment. Safety standards and engineering criteria are published for the construction, operation, installation and maintenance of numerous appliances. There is a district office located in Richmond, BC.

Note that CSA and ULC have distinct jurisdictions, with CSA responsible for testing the fire safety performance of electrical and oil burning equipment and ULC taking care of all other items.

***Fire Underwriters' Survey (FUS)***

This survey service organization evaluates all municipal fire defences, such as the water supply, the condition of apparatus and training. Although they generally act at the request of municipalities, FUS routinely surveys a community every three years and assigns it a rating. Underwriters use this rating to evaluate risk and determine insurance premiums to be charged to business and homeowners in that community.

***Insurance Crime Prevention Bureau (ICPB)***

The Insurance Crime Prevention Bureau (ICPB) is a non-profit organization supported by 95 per cent of insurance companies across Canada. Its main purpose is to detect and discourage crimes against insurance companies. This includes all false claims relating to fire, mysterious disappearances, break and enters, and proofs of loss. In B.C.

the head office is in Burnaby. Inspectors from ICPB can be expected to be present at the scene of fires. ICPB has no regulatory authority.

### ***Insurers' Advisory Organization (IAO)***

The IAO is supported by member insurance companies. The IAO's primary service is to prepare inspection reports of risk for specific buildings. These reports can be sold to any individual who has a legitimate interest in, but does not necessarily own, the property. Another product of an inspection is the assignment of a rating that may be used by independent underwriters to arrive at base premium rates. These rates are charged to the building owner for fire protection insurance.

### ***National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)***

This non-profit, U.S. based association has published over 150 fire protection standards. These standards are reviewed in Canada and many of them are adopted. A quarterly magazine is distributed to members and contains current information on new developments in fire protection and prevention. It also issues special reports, bulletins, books, posters, visual aids and fire-related periodicals.

NFPA is sometimes called the information centre of fire safety knowledge and has worldwide recognition as an authority in this field.

NFPA is a standards writing body and is important to Canadians because many of the codes in this country refer to specific standards written by NFPA. Some municipalities have adopted some of their standards in their bylaws.

### ***Research Facility***

In BC, the BC Research Foundation provides two valuable services:

- It tests equipment for manufacturers to determine conformance to existing standards. For instance, it will test a new type of oil burning appliance to ensure that it conforms to existing CSA standard. The test results are given to the manufacturer, who can then apply to CSA for certification.

- It supplies all information relating to tests, specifications and so on, on appliances and commodities tested through their testing facility – including items from the scene of a fire – to authorities such as Fire Chiefs. It supplies this information free of charge.

The B.C. Research Foundation is located on the University Endowment Lands in Vancouver, BC.

### ***Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (ULC)***

ULC, incorporated in 1920, is a self-supporting organization that conducts tests for public safety. It develops and publishes standards, classifications and specifications for products related to life, fire and property hazards. Items tested include fire detection equipment, building materials, fireplaces and fire doors.

ULC is accredited by the Standards Council of Canada as a Certification Organization and a Standards Writing Organization under the National Standards System of Canada.

Products bearing the ULC label have been tested and meet applicable performance standards recognized by various federal, provincial and municipal authorities and insurance inspection agencies.

Their head office is located in Scarborough, Ontario. The American counterpart to the ULC is Underwriters' Laboratories Inc. (UL).

### ***Warnock Hersey Professional Services Ltd.***

Warnock Hersey is an independent certification and testing agency. They supply a certification label that is accepted by provincial authorities, such as the Fire Commissioner Office, household inspectors and local fire officials.

It is also noteworthy that this organization conducts monthly tests on cellulose insulation requiring a CMHC approval and are authorized to give this insulation the national certification required by the National Building Code.

### ***Worksafe BC (formerly Workers' Compensation Board - WCB)***

Worksafe BC is a provincial body that is constituted under the federal *Workers' Compensation Act*, is given the mandate to assist the industries of each province with the reduction of claims through the enactment of regulations and the provision of educational services. The WCB develops the *Safety and Health Regulations* that apply to all industries covered by the Act, including fire fighting. The regulations apply to workers who are employed in fire fighting activities on a full- or part-time basis, including volunteer fire fighters in municipal and private fire brigades. For convenience, the regulations are divided into a number of different sections. All the regulations apply to fire fighting. Some of particular interests include:

- Application of regulations, health and safety programs, accident investigation, general requirements
- Diving
- Harmful substances
- Health hazards
- Personal protective equipment
- Machinery, equipment and industrial processes
- Fire fighting

A separate section on fire fighting is included in the regulations to provide some additional requirements specific to the needs of the industry. It deals with such topics as personal protective equipment, transportation, aerial devices and hazardous materials.

### ***Other Associations***

There are many regional and provincial associations that deal with fire protection and law enforcement issues. In British Columbia some examples of other associations:

- The Fire Chiefs' Association of BC.
- The Fire Prevention Officers' Association of BC.

- The Greater Vancouver Fire Prevention Association. The main aims of this association are to reduce fire losses through the promotion of fire prevention education and to facilitate mutual aid between existing fire services and industry.

## **Community Agencies**

The following are examples of community agencies that call takers may refer to.

- AIDS support
- Child protection advocates
- Crisis lines
- Detox
- Emergency shelters
- Group homes
- Hospitals
- First Nations offices and services
- The Salvation Army
- Search and rescue agencies
- Sexual assault advocates
- The SPCA and other animal rescue organizations
- Suicide prevention
- Transitions houses

## **Private Agencies**

The following are examples of private agencies that call takers may refer to:

- Alarm monitoring companies
- Bee swarm control
- The Better Business Bureau
- Fire prevention companies



- Insurance agencies
- Local media
  - Radio
  - Television
- Newspapers
  - Dailies
  - Weeklies
  - Others
- Locksmiths
- Public transportation
  - Bus stations
  - Train stations
  - Taxicabs
  - Ferries
  - Airports
- Public utility agencies
  - Hydro problem reporting
  - Gas problem reporting
- Telephone companies
  - Call tracing
  - Reporting problems with telecommunications devices
- Towing companies and impound yards
- The Welcome Wagon

## Chapter 4: Technical Terms Used in Call Processing

### Common Technical Terms and Definitions

#### ***Automatic Number Identification (ANI)***

*Automatic number identification (ANI)* is a feature of an enhanced 9-1-1 system. When a call is received over a 9-1-1 line, the telephone number associated with the telephone from which the call originated is displayed to the call taker. In certain circumstances, the ANI information may not be the actual telephone number that the call is being placed from. For example, calls that are placed through a switchboard or a large in-house telephone system may display a generic number (such as 599-3000). For example, if the call is coming from 599-1234, the number displayed to the call taker may be 599-3000 and not the local 599-1234. ANI information should always be verified with the caller. In the case of cellular telephone calls and other wireless telephone communications systems, the ANI information will be generic in nature and of no value to the call taker.

#### ***Automatic Location Identification (ALI)***

*Automatic location identification (ALI)* is a feature of an enhanced 9-1-1 system. When a call is received over a 9-1-1 line, the billing or repair address associated with the telephone number that the call is being made from is displayed to the call taker. In certain circumstances, the ALI information may not correspond to the actual location of the caller. The ALI information that the 9-1-1 call taker receives may be the location of the telephone exchange equipment and not necessarily the location of the caller.

For example, Kwantlen Polytechnic University has a centralized telephone system located in Surrey that serves four campuses (Langley, Cloverdale, Richmond and Surrey) in different jurisdictions. The ALI mistakenly identifies a call from the Richmond campus as coming from Surrey.

The call taker should always verify ALI information with the caller. In the case of cellular telephone calls and other wireless telephone

communications systems, the ALI information will either not be displayed, or may be generic in nature and of no value to the call taker.

### ***Automatic Call Distribution (ACD)***

*Automatic call distribution (ACD)* is a feature of certain types of telephone equipment and is often found in large 9-1-1 operations. ACD systems can be programmed to automatically distribute incoming calls to call-taking positions in the Primary Safety Answering Point (PSAP). Calls appear to the next available call taker and will queue automatically according to when the calls arrived at the PSAP. ACD systems are also used in applications such as airline reservation systems. ACD systems usually come with call-management software that provides a wealth of statistics, such as for example the average number of rings before an answer, the call service time, the call volume per hour, day, month or season, and so on.

### ***Exchange Services***

Any local telecommunications service offered by a CLEC to its end-user subscribers, either directly or indirectly through an authorized reseller under the terms of a tariff and / or agreement.

### ***Local Subscriber***

An end user located within the municipal boundaries who subscribes to any of the CLEC's exchange services.

### ***Ring Back/Call Back***

*Ring back/call back* is a feature available with some telephone systems that enables the call taker to automatically place a call back to a telephone number from which a 9-1-1 call was placed. This feature would be used for a situation where a 9-1-1 call was interrupted prematurely, or for an abandoned 9-1-1 call.

### ***Serving Area***

The area within the municipality's boundaries from which E9-1-1 calls would be directed to a particular PSAP (public safety answering point).

### ***Trunks***

*Trunks* are physical telephone lines that are connected to a Public Safety Communication Centre, or to a telephone. If one says there are three 9-1-1 trunks terminating in the Public Safety Communication Centre, this means that there are three individual telephone lines that are connected to the Public Safety Communication Centre equipment.

### ***Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD/TTY)***

*Telecommunications devices for the deaf* (TDDs) and *teletypewriters for the deaf* (TTYs) are used by hearing- and speech-impaired people to communicate over telephone systems. The devices consist of a modem, a keyboard and a visual display.

### ***AT&T Language Line***

The American company AT&T operates a language line to provide translator and translation services for telephone communications.

Various agencies may use other technical terms. The following *Glossary of Terms* lists the most common acronyms and their meanings. Other terms will be used, depending on the agency where you will work.

### ***E9-1-1 Calling Service***

The ILEC (Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier) /CLEC (Competitive Local Exchange Carrier) service that provides the local subscriber with the universally recognized E9-1-1 three digit dial access to ERA's serving their communities.

### ***E9-1-1 Database***

The database operated by the E9-1-1 service provider that contains the street names, addresses, routing codes and other data required for the management of selective routing and transfer, ALI and ANI.

### ***E9-1-1 Service Provider***

The ILEC that provides an E9-1-1 service to the municipality, pursuant to a tariff and / or agreement through which access to E9-1-1 emergency calling is made available in the service area.

### ***Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)***

*Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)* refers to a class of computer equipment used by public safety communications operators to assist in call taking and dispatching. CAD systems come in a variety of configurations – they can be quite simple with very few automated features, or quite complex. The key words are *computer aided*, so any type of system that is computerized is a CAD system. Some common CAD systems are CIIDS (described below), Intergraph, MDI and Microstat.

### ***Police Records Information Management Environment (PRIME)***

The *Police Records Information Management Environment (PRIME)* is used by all police agencies in BC. Every police agency uses this system that is an information index system that is used to match people and events to determine a person's involvement in reportable police incidents. Prior to PRIME, police used a system called PIRS to query a name and know whether or not the individual is a suspect, complainant, victim, witness and so on. The development of shared information management was heavily influenced by the activities of mass murderer Clifford Olson and the difficulties encountered by investigators in tracking his activities.

### ***Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC)***

The *Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC)* system is a Canada-wide computerized information system operated by the Canadian police services, under the care and control of the RCMP. Most Canadian police agencies use CPIC to query persons, vehicles, property, guns and a variety of other articles. In most provinces, the CPIC system is interfaced to the provincial Motor Vehicle Branch, which facilitates the automatic querying of information about vehicles and driver's licenses. The CPIC system was one of the first of its kind anywhere in the world and went on line in 1972. It has served as the model operational on-line query system for major world police and intelligence agencies. It has been vastly improved and updated since it first went on line. The CPIC mainframe is located in the RCMP Informatics Directorate complex, in Ottawa.

### ***National Crime Information Centre (NCIC)***

*National Crime Information Centre (NCIC)* is the American equivalent of the CPIC system. Queries through NCIC can be done via the CPIC system. These queries are processed through an interface in Ottawa.

### ***Geographical Information Systems (GIS)***

A *geographical Information Systems (GIS)* is an automated system that displays geographic information on a video display terminal, or a large video screen. GIS systems are used to aid dispatchers and responders in coordinating perimeters, deciding which route to take and so on. Most systems have the capability of displaying overhead or mapped views of a particular location and can zoom in or out depending on the sophistication of the system and how detailed the database is. GIS systems have only recently started to gain in popularity. This delay is primarily accountable to the tremendous amount of computer processing time and memory storage space that these systems require. Only recently has the technology allowed the use of GIS systems to have practical applications in public safety communications environments.

### ***Global Positioning Systems (GPS)***

*Global Positioning Systems (GPS)* are typically systems that use satellite and ground-station technology to determine the position of a GPS transponder. Transponders can be hand held, or permanently affixed to a vehicle, bicycle or any other moving object. GPS systems can determine a transponder's location virtually anywhere on the planet and are accurate to within several meters.

### ***Latitude / Longitude***

Latitude and Longitude are geographic coordinates that indicate a precise point on the surface of the earth. The measurements are normally expressed in degrees. Global positioning systems use lat/long coordinates to locate devices based on their locations in proximity to the receivers. Cell phone providers will give call takers the address and coordinates of the nearest cell tower with an uncertainty range, usually expressed in metres. The uncertainty range is the approximate distance

from the cell tower. This can be used to try and locate someone on a cell phone. An example may come to the call taker like this:

Tower address: 17599 56th Avenue, Surrey

Provider: Telmo

Cell number: 778-842-1209

Lat/long: 49.103896 -122.723293 -- UNCTY: 3m

### ***Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL)***

*Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL)* systems are used to determine the location of a moving object. AVL systems typically are used in large metropolitan areas and may or may not use GPS technology. AVL systems are typically used to track the movements of vehicles. Like GIS systems, AVL systems have only recently started to gain in popularity. This delay is primarily accountable to the tremendous amount of computer processing time and memory storage space that these systems require.

### **Other Terms used in Public Safety Communications**

Please refer to Appendix I.

## **SECTION 3**

# **PROCESS PUBLIC SAFETY CALLS**

### **Chapter 1:**

## **Information Required for Call Processing**

To process a typical call you will need to record and supply the following information:

#### ***Location of incident***

This is where the incident happened or is happening. For the purpose of attendance by all emergency personnel, this may include a physical description of the site to further identify it, or perhaps a layout of the building or its surroundings to identify points of entrance, exits or any hazards associated with it. For the purpose of fire attendance, the material composition of the structure and any hazardous components, chemicals or risk-enhancing layouts would apply.

#### ***Details of incident***

This will contain a brief synopsis of what has happened. This could include how the incident started or how the injuries were sustained.

#### ***Name***

This could be the name of the caller (which may be different from the name of the victim), of the person requiring assistance, or of the witness, or of the person to see, or of the person who made the initial complaint.

Always be sure that, if they are different from details about your caller, details about the victim(s) or witness(es) are recorded somewhere on your form, ticket or screen. These details would include the full address, phone number, date of birth and any other known particulars.

If your caller, victim, witness or suspect is a minor (under 21 years of age), you must, if possible, record full details on the juvenile's parent



or guardian. This also applies if the individual involved is a senior or a mentally challenged individual.

***Address of caller***

This is the home address of the caller, which may be different from the location of the incident.

***Telephone number of caller***

This refers to number of the caller and it should be clear on your screen or form if it is the home, business or cellular number. Use the appropriate field on your screen to specify exactly how this number refers to the caller and include the area code, if applicable.

***Suspect information***

Suspect information is important in police investigations and would include a name, address, telephone number and date of birth, if known. If not, this field would include a physical description of the suspect(s), the location of the suspect at the time of the call and information on weapons associated with the suspect. Information on the location of the suspect would indicate *exactly* where the suspect is. For example if he is in a residence, determine what room he was last seen in. If the suspect (or suspects) has left the scene, ascertain by what method of travel he left (by vehicle or public transportation, on foot) and determine the time delay involved in his departure. The same is true in gathering any person's descriptions.

*Be specific* in gathering information about the physical description of the suspect. The description should include as much of the following information as possible.

- Age or approximate age.
- Sex.
- Height and weight.
- Race.
- Color, length and style of hair.
- Facial hair, if any (beard, mustache).

- Whether the suspect is wearing eyeglasses or sunglasses.
- A precise description of clothing from head to toe, including headgear and footwear, and the color and style of the clothing.
- Any accent or speech impediment.
- Whether the suspect is wearing any jewelry, include rings, earrings, bracelets, necklaces, and so on.
- Distinguishing marks or tattoos. If there are tattoos or brands, be specific in their descriptions and location on the body. Other distinguishing marks may include pockmarks, acne or scars.
- Any information on a known criminal record or mental health problems, including known medication for a specific illness such as schizophrenia.
- *Weapons.* Was the suspect *seen* carrying one or was the weapon simulated or indicated? If the weapon was seen, supply a full description of the type of weapon. In gathering this information, establish how familiar your caller is with firearms to ensure as much accuracy as possible in determining the type of weapon. If the weapon was simulated or indicated, establish how the suspect intimated he was in possession of one. Did the suspect indicate with a note or through a physical action that he or she was carrying a weapon? Find out where the weapon is located. Was it last seen on his person and if so, where on his person? Was it last seen in his vehicle and if so, where in the vehicle?
- In any situation that shows the slightest indication of violence or risk, or escalation to either, *always* ask about weapons. This includes asking your caller if the suspect has access to firearms and if he does, where they are.

This field may also include any known relationship between the suspect and caller or victim. If more than one suspect is involved, ensure that information on each suspect is clearly identified to the applicable individual.

### ***Vehicle information***

As with suspect information, be specific in describing the vehicle. A vehicle description should be done in a logical format. For example: 1996 Ford Mustang 2-door sedan, silver with BC license ABC123 relays all of the pertinent information in a simple format.

- Y** Year of vehicle ..... (*Specify year if known, or approximate age of vehicle as in “late-model Ford Taurus”.*)
- M** Make of vehicle..... (*Specify the make, as in Ford, and the model if known, as in Taurus.*)
- M** Model of vehicle ..... (*Specify the model if known, as in Taurus.*)
- S** Style ..... (*Mention whether it is a two-door, four-door, convertible or hatchback, to list four examples.*)
- C** Color of vehicle..... (*If the vehicle is two-toned or multicolored, identify where the colors are on the vehicle.*)
- P** Province or State ..... (*Name the province or state on the license plate.*)
- P** Plate..... (*Give the license plate number of the vehicle if known.*)
- A** Additional Info ..... (*Mention for instance any body damage, or unique features such as a tow package, stickers, markings or custom body work.*)

Vehicle information would include the vehicle location at the time of the call or if the vehicle has left the scene. If it has left the scene, determine the direction of travel, rate of speed and the time delay involved in its departure.

### **Preparing a Report for Dispatch**

It is essential that information on suspects, associated vehicles and structures be relayed as quickly and completely as possible to the dispatcher. These details should be given to the dispatcher in a systematic and orderly fashion. Most callers, however, do not supply the details in the same order in which you will relay them. *Control* the

call and gather facts in a logical order of priority based on the type of call, and the risk to public and field personnel safety.

Depending on the system in use at an agency, you may be preparing a report for dispatching the above information from a completed form or by reading a screen.

The occurrence report is completed for record-keeping purposes, as well as to gather statistics and intelligence, to identify crime patterns, and to be distributed within your agency and to others.

The incident log book generally contains only the briefest of information and is used as an easily read reference for personnel to determine how busy the shift has been and what type of calls have been prevalent. Like the other forms, it should be completed in a professional, concise manner as the logbook is archived as a permanent record in most agencies.

If your agency uses an automated incident processing system such as Versadex Police or CIIDS, information is transferred from the call taker to the dispatcher electronically and immediately. This same information is electronically archived within the system and becomes a component of an electronic log or a computer report.

Remember that reports are an integral part of the criminal process and may be used in a conviction or in court. Record the facts in a clear and concise manner and do not interject personal opinions or bias. Work with various forms and screens, noting the similarities and the differences between them, as well how you can use them as guidelines for questioning callers and relaying information. Practice using the forms and screens until you are completely familiar with them – for the first time and every time.

Call takers' efficiency depends on their ability to exercise a number of skills (such as emotional control, rational analysis, good verbal communication, conflict resolution, keyboarding, effective listening, to name but a few). Effective dispatch communications depends on *speed* and *accuracy*. You cannot sacrifice one for the other.

## **Is the Report Complete? Can it be Dispatched?**

As a call taker, you will be responsible for ensuring that the information you gather is *complete, concise, clear, and correct* (four Cs). This requires that you evaluate the report you are generating. A report must be self-explanatory, since it is often directed to a person removed from the source of the incident. The recipient depends on the thoroughness and accuracy of the report to obtain the facts he or she needs. If any part of the communication requires further explanation, the report has failed to serve its purpose. In evaluating the report, you should ask yourself the following questions:

### ***Is the Report Complete?***

Does it contain all the information necessary to accomplish its purpose?

Does it answer all the questions the reader may have in mind?

Does it answer the questions where, when, who, what, why, and how (and weapons)?

The report must incorporate all the available facts and information that pertain to the problem or the case. Partially stated facts should not be incorporated in a report as they are misleading and may cause the reader to reach wrong decisions.

### ***Is the Report Concise?***

Being longwinded is the curse of many writers. Eliminating superfluous words and phrases that make a report excessively wordy will save time and unnecessary work for the reader.

### ***Is the Report Clear?***

The first objective of any written communication is to convey ideas so that they cannot be misunderstood. The choice of words will affect how effective the report is. Words should be simple and unambiguous. A barrier to quick understanding is the unnecessary use of complex or unusual words.

### ***Is the Report Correct?***

Reports must be factual. Errors reflect badly upon the ability and, at times, the integrity of the writer. The content must consist of a true representation of the facts.

The information in a report depends on the purpose of the report. The purpose of the report is to inform the recipient about certain activities and their outcome. In an investigation, the object is to secure the information that explains an occurrence. Therefore, in processing an incident, a call taker should always bear in mind that the primary purpose in processing the incident is to inform.

Call takers relate the circumstances of a reported incident to responder personnel. In preparing the account of the circumstances surrounding an incident, call takers cannot assume that the recipient will have any knowledge of the incident. They cannot expect that the recipient will be able to fill in the details. They must assume that the recipient's only information about the incident will come from the report itself.

Reports that demonstrate the four Cs reflect positively on the call taker's ability and attitude, and on the communication center's efficiency. It is not enough to ask the right questions: the call taker must also record the information accurately and process it expeditiously.



## Chapter 2: Prioritizing and Managing Emergency Calls

### **Prioritizing Calls**

Prioritizing calls is one of the call taker's most important functions. It is your responsibility as a call taker to ascertain facts from the caller and determine the level of response required of you and your agency. This responsibility cannot be overstated. Incorrectly assessing a call can have dire consequence for the caller, the field units and you. In addition to facing ethical and emotional repercussions, you could be held civilly or criminally responsible along with your agency.

Depending on the agency, different priorities assigned will produce different levels of response. For example, personal-injury accidents will require the attendance of a police officer, often a medical crew such as an ambulance and possibly a fire truck. Motor vehicle accidents without injury and under a specified amount of damage (apparent damage) will require the drivers to either exchange information or report to a local accident reporting centre, insurance-claim assessment centre, or the like.

Most agencies prioritize calls into four categories: priorities 1, 2, 3 and 4. Depending on the priority assigned, the dispatcher will react to have resources sent immediately, as soon as possible or not at all. Each agency will have its own set of procedures for determining how calls are prioritized and for dealing with specific types of call. This guide will provide you with a sense of how public safety agencies assign priority.

#### ***Priority 1***

This priority refers to a call that is in progress and/or a situation in which there is immediate danger to life. Some examples of a priority 1 call would be a fire, a life-threatening situation, a natural disaster, a bomb threat, an armed robbery or any call involving weapons that could potentially harm another person. Units dispatched to a priority 1 call would use full lights and sirens and emergency response.



### ***Priority 2***

A call of this nature, while serious, does not present any immediate danger to human life. Typically these calls would involve incidents that have just occurred or occurred a short time ago, but are not in progress at the time of the call. Examples include sexual assault in which the suspect has left, a robbery that has occurred but is now over, a motor vehicle accident with non-life-threatening injuries. It is still extremely important to have units attend to calls of this nature as soon as possible, but a lights and sirens response may not be necessary.

### ***Priority 3***

A priority 3 call is sometimes termed a non-emergency call or a “cold call”. While it may be necessary to send a unit to this type of call, there is no urgency as to how soon they arrive on the scene. Examples include: B&E or theft that occurred at an unspecified time, a shoplifter who is in custody by security, or a property damage type of incident.

### ***Priority 4***

Many agencies consider a priority 4 call to be for information purposes only. It often does not require the physical attendance of a member of the agency, and can often be dealt with over the telephone. Many insurance type claims that require a police-report file number fall into this category. The call taker simply fills out the information required, issues an occurrence number and then files the report into the records-keeping system for future reference.

## **Managing Emergency Calls**

Set high personal standards of proficiency on your job, and work hard to maintain them. A professional attitude *towards* the job, every day, will minimize errors *on* the job. Every call you answer will require that *you* make a judgment based on your application of common sense, experience and the following principles:

### **Control the Call**

Always remember that the caller has contacted *you* for help. You must be in control of the conversation. Do not allow the caller to ramble or get off topic. Time is of the essence in emergencies, and you cannot

afford to waste it by allowing the caller to lose focus. Ask pertinent questions and insist on answers. Do not let the caller tell you what to do – it is your job to determine the action to take with each call. Be authoritative in your directions or instructions to the caller.

### **Keep the Caller on the Line**

Keeping a caller on the line serves a number of purposes. It allows you to be in a position to constantly update the dispatcher and field units about any new information that may assist them. Any potential new dangers or situational changes can be communicated immediately, minimizing the risk to both the caller and agency personnel. After you have noted initial details, you can glean secondary information from the caller while the call is active. Consider landmarks that may more easily identify their residence, businesses or the scene in question.

Supplemental information will assist field units in locating the scene. For example, you can ask the caller whether the caller's front porch lights are on, whether the house number is clearly visible from the street, whether there is a car in the driveway and what color it is, and so on. Units that may be searching a yard, or entering a scene, will want to know if there is a dog to contend with. If the call is in progress and your caller has a visual on the scene, he or she can immediately advise you on an escalation in the situation or, if there are suspects, which direction they go in when they leave the scene and what mode of transportation they use. This constant update of information can greatly assist the dispatcher and the field units in the decisions they must make in their handling of the call.

Keeping callers on the line is also effective in calming them: you can reassure them in this way that you are listening to them and that help is on the way. It enables you to keep the caller focused on the task of supplying details rather than on their injuries or other distractions at hand.

### **Remain Objective**

Do not take on the emotions of the caller. This disables you from obtaining all the information you require. Remain calm even if the caller does not. Make no judgments or assumptions about the caller, the event, or its possible outcomes. Concentrate on the details you need and

the appropriate actions you must take. Put aside your personal feelings and do your job in a professional, impartial manner.

### **Use the Chain of Command**

Each agency has its own chain of command. Understand how it works and the role each supervisor plays within it. Remember *your* role within this network and act appropriately within its parameters. Use the expertise and knowledge of your supervisors or senior personnel in dealing with difficult calls and callers. Solicit their advice or assistance regarding policy and procedures. Follow the guidelines of your agency with reference to the chain of command during an emergency. Know which of your superiors should be informed and at what point during an emergency.

### **Use Teamwork**

You are part of a team that may consist of other call takers, dispatchers, supervisors and field units within your emergency service environment. Each person you work with will have knowledge and skills unique to himself or herself. Observe these people's techniques and learn from them. Count on your team members when you have a heavy workload, when you are under stress or when you are dealing with difficult calls or callers. Never be afraid to ask for help. In emergency call taking, the consequences of incorrect actions can have tragic results. Do not let pride or ignorance stand in the way of asking for assistance.

### **Communicate with Other Agencies**

In many emergency situations, other agencies will respond along with your own. Communicate with them in order to gain information, and update them with information that may apply to their job. Make sure that you are aware of any direct lines available to these agencies at your job site and understand how they work. Know where telephone numbers are kept for other agencies and departments. Memorize all frequently used numbers. Use plain language when speaking to other responding agencies. Their codes may very well be different from those that your agency uses.

### **Use Outside Support Agencies**

Language barriers can be minimized by using the services of the Language Line or an appropriate local service agency. Learn who speaks a different language in your communication centre or agency and what language or languages they are proficient in. Learn what language services are available to your own agency and how to access them. Know where the information is located regarding these services and be familiar with how they work, including any policies regarding their use. Be prepared with this information in advance. Your first call where language is an issue is not the time to figure out how these systems work.

### **React When You Have Necessary Information**

Ensure that you have all the details you require to properly assess each call. Do not react without first practicing the five W's and one H. Know what you are doing before you do it. Do not be pressured by either the caller or situation into taking action before you have gathered all the appropriate details. You can advise the caller in a polite but firm manner that you will be able to assist them once you have the required information. It is more important to assess a call properly than it is to record it swiftly on your screen or form. In situations where you have only sketchy information, or where the caller gives incomplete information and hangs up, or where the caller simply abandons the call, you will need to acquire information through other means. Try and trace the call, use call-back, use the reference directories for more information, or apply your knowledge of the neighbourhood from which the caller phoned and incidents that might occur there.

### **Enlist Assistance from Other People at the Scene**

If your caller has difficulty with English or is in a state of panic or hysteria that creates a barrier to collecting all the details you need, ask him or her if there is anyone else you can talk to. There may be other people at the scene with a better command of the language or of their emotions who can fill in any missing details.

### **Involve the Caller**

Many callers asking for assistance experience a feeling of total helplessness. They are in a situation completely out of their control.

Many times giving them a little bit of control over *their* actions will ease their anxiety and calm their emotions. This does *not* mean allowing them to *lead* you through the call. Rather, it means getting them to participate in the assistance process. This can be as simple as asking them to turn on their porch light for the arriving units or calling their pets in before the police dog arrives. Commend them for accurate information or their calm telephone manner and stimulate their thought processes so they can remember more details. You can control the call and still leave a caller feeling that he or she had a hand in solving the problem at hand or in bringing a situation to a satisfactory conclusion.

### **Use Call Backs**

There may be times when you get disconnected from a caller or he or she is unable to stay on the line with you at that particular time. Call them back, identify yourself and the reason for the call back. You may do so to gather supplementary information or simply to inform the caller of the status of their call. Call backs are also a means of satisfying callers who may have been shuffled aside for a more emergent situation. Call backs serve two purposes: one, they may supply more details to help you in assessing a call and two, they are an excellent way to promote your agency's image.

### **End the Call**

Not every call that you take in a communications centre will require you to keep the caller on the phone until help arrives. In fact, most calls will probably be dealt with in 30 seconds or less. For the most part, you will probably rarely encounter the type of call that requires you to keep the caller on the line until help arrives. Once you have ascertained the information that you need to deal with the incident effectively, you can end the call. It can be as simple as telling the caller that someone will be attending and reassuring them that they have done the right thing to call or referring the caller to some other agency better equipped to deal with their problem. Some incidents will require you to give instructions to the caller prior to the arrival of the emergency responders. These instructions may include something like turning on lights, waiting for emergency personnel to arrive or assisting responders in some other way.

It is your job as a call taker to get the information as quickly and as efficiently as possible; to deal with the call effectively; and to ensure that the appropriate response is made to the incident. As the techniques of call processing become more familiar to you in your job, you will find yourself able to deal with calls quickly and process them effectively.

### **Practice Techniques of Call Processing**

Develop a style and level of expertise in a variety of call taking techniques. Be flexible in their usage and realize that a technique that works on one caller may not work on another. Practice your communication skills and be open-minded to new approaches. Remember, each call and each caller presents a new challenge to you. Never believe you know it all.

### **Be Proficient in Multi-Tasking**

You will learn to screen multiple calls. Learn to quickly gather enough information to determine the priority of incoming calls in order to facilitate response to emergency calls. Be effective in handling more than one call at a time. Your skill involves being able to keep track of several calls at once, never forgetting the nature of each one, and managing them in an appropriate manner. Keep detailed notes of your calls. It is impossible to memorize all the information you receive. Apply your common sense to determine which calls are of a higher priority. If your emergency lines are ringing, it is okay to put lower priority calls on hold to answer the other lines. Inform the caller that you are putting them on hold, tell them why you are doing so, and assure them you will come back to their call.

All of these techniques are part of efficient call taking and processing. Practice them until they are second nature.



**APPENDIX I  
GLOSSARY OF TERMS  
FOR PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS**

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## Glossary of Terms

1 AWAY .....	Unit is one block away from call/incident
1 FOR COVER .....	One vehicle between police car and followed vehicle (surveillance)
215.....	24-hour roadside suspension
9-1-1 .....	North American emergency number
ABAN 9-1-1.....	A hang-up/abandoned 9-1-1 call
ACD .....	Automatic Call Distribution
ACUPIES .....	Automated Canada/USA Police Information Exchange System (CPIC)
ADA .....	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADMIN .....	Administration, administrative (1990)
AFFIRMATIVE.....	Yes, okay
AKA .....	Also Known As (alias)
ALI.....	Automatic location identification 9-1-1.
ANI .....	Automatic Number Identification 9-1-1.
ANI/ALI.....	Automatic Number Identification/Address Location Identification
AOD .....	Absent On Duty
AOI .....	Address of Interest/Importance
AOL .....	Absent On Leave
APB.....	All Points Bulletin
APCO .....	Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (professional organization for communications)
ATTN .....	Attention
AUDIBLE .....	Audible alarm
AUTH .....	Message sent on the authority of

- AVL ..... Automatic Vehicle Location
- AWOL..... Absent Without Leave
- B&E or BNE ..... Break and Enter
- BCDL ..... British Columbia Driver’s License
- BCL ..... British Columbia License (license plate)
- BE & T ..... Break, Enter & Theft
- BOLO/BOLF ..... Be On Lookout/Be On Lookout For
- BR ..... Branch
- BTA..... Breathalyzer testing analysis or breathalyzer technician analyst
- BTA OPERATOR..... BTA machine operator
- C & E ..... Customs and Excise
- CAD ..... Computer Aided Dispatch
- CALL CONTROL .... Feature that allows the E-9-1-1 Call taker to maintain physical control of call regardless of the caller’s actions
- Call Check..... A device that allows the user to instantly playback all (or portions of) a call for service to clarify or validate what was heard by the operator to what was said by the caller.
- CANCEL..... Cancellation
- CB ..... Citizens Band (radio)
- CCC..... Canadian Criminal Code
- CCTV ..... Closed Circuit Television
- CIIDS ..... Computerized Integrated Information Dispatch System
- CISD..... Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
- CISM ..... Critical Incident Stress Management

Civic Address.....	Any city-style address that includes a house number and a street name (e.g. 5500 180 Street, Surrey)
CLEC .....	Competitive Local Exchange Carrier
CLEU .....	Coordinated Law-Enforcement Unit
CNI.....	Criminal Name Index, or Criminal Number Identification
COM .....	Complainant
COMM/OP.....	Communications operator
COMMS.....	Communications division
Conference/Transfer ..	The capability to bridge a third party to an existing call. Also known as three-way calling.
CPU.....	Central Processing Unit (computer)
CRT.....	Court
CRTC .....	Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission
CSIS .....	Canadian Security Intelligence Service
D/L .....	Driver's license
DECAL .....	Tag/valtag on vehicle
Decibel .....	A unit for expressing the relative intensity of sounds
DICTAPHONE .....	Tape recorder
DID .....	Direct Inward Dialing (direct number without going through switchboard)
DIR.....	Director or Directorate
DISP .....	Dispatcher
DIST.....	District
DIV .....	Division
DLN .....	Driver's License/Driver's License Number

DMV .....	Department of Motor Vehicles (USA)
DND .....	Department of National Defence
DOA .....	Dead On Arrival
DOB .....	Date of Birth
DOJ .....	Department of Justice
DOT .....	Direction Of Travel
DUI.....	Driving Under the Influence
DWI.....	Driving While Impaired
E 9-1-1 .....	Enhanced 9-1-1
EHS .....	Emergency Health Services (ambulance)
EMBC .....	Emergency Management BC
EMS .....	Emergency Medical Service
EMT .....	Emergency Medical Technician
ERA.....	Emergency Response Agency
ERT .....	Emergency Response Team
ESZ.....	Emergency Service Zone
ETA .....	Estimated Time of Arrival
ETNS.....	Emergency Telephone Number System
F .....	Female
FAC .....	Firearms Acquisition Certificate
FATAL MVA .....	Motor Vehicle Accident with a deceased person
FBI .....	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FLOATER.....	Body in water
FM .....	Frequency Modulation or from
FRS.....	Family Radio Service
Geo-Location.....	Latitude, longitude, elevation, and the datum which identifies the coordinate system used

GIS .....	Geographic Information System
GIVEN 1,2,3 .....	First, second & third names of persons
GOA .....	Gone On Arrival
GPS .....	Geographical Positioning System
GRS.....	General Radio Service
HARDLINE .....	Wired in telephone (non-cellular)
Hertz.....	A unit of sound frequency of one cycle per second (e.g. MHz)
HIN .....	Hull Identification Number (boat)
HOOK.....	Tow truck (slang)
HQ.....	Headquarters
IC.....	Integrated Circuit or In Charge
ID .....	Identification
IHL.....	Incident History Listing
IIM .....	Individualized Instruction Method courses (training)
ILEC.....	Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier
IM.....	Instant Messaging
INFO .....	Information
Intl.....	International
INTERPOL .....	International Police
IP .....	Internet Protocol
IRP .....	Immediate Roadside Prohibition
ITU .....	International Telecommunications Union
JAWS .....	Equipment used to free trapped people (jaws of life)
JIBC .....	Justice Institute (B.C.)
JP.....	Justice of the Peace

JUMPER .....	Suicidal person (that is, a subject who is preparing to jump to his/her death or who has done so)
KEYHOLDER .....	Owner of business, or emergency contact person
KHZ .....	Kilohertz
LAN .....	Local Area Network
Landline.....	Telephone call from a wired phone
Lat/Long.....	Latitude / Longitude Coordinates
LCD.....	Liquid Crystal Display
LED .....	Light Emitting Diode
LIC .....	License number
LKA .....	Last Known Address
LNU .....	Last Name Unknown
LP .....	License Plate
M .....	Male
M/V .....	Motor Vessel
MCF .....	Ministry of Children & Families
MDN .....	Mobile Directory Number (wireless)
MDT.....	Mobile Data Terminal
MHZ.....	Megahertz
MNI.....	Master Name Index (PRIME)
MOCOM .....	Mobile communications vehicle
MOTI .....	Ministry of Transportations & Infrastructure
MP .....	Military Police
MRDS .....	Mobile Radio Data System
MSAG .....	Master Street Address Guide
MSS.....	Ministry of Social Services

MUN .....	Municipal
MVA .....	Motor Vehicle Accident
MVI.....	Motor Vehicle Incident (same as MVA )
NATB.....	National Auto Theft Bureau
NCIC .....	National Crime Information Centre
NEG/NEGATIVE .....	No, none
NENA .....	National Emergency Number Association (1982)
NFA.....	No Fixed Address, or No Further Action
NG 9-1-1 .....	Next Generation 9-1-1
NICAD .....	Nickel cadmium battery
NIS .....	Not In Service
NOK.....	Next Of Kin
OBS.....	Observation
OCC .....	Operational Communications Centre
ODN.....	Operator Drivers Number (DL)
OP .....	Overpass
OPS .....	Operations
OTA .....	On The Air (monitoring the radio)
PAL.....	Possession and Acquisition Licence (firearms)
PEP.....	Provincial Emergency Program
PIN # .....	Personal ID number
PIRS .....	Police Information Retrieval System
PODN.....	Principal operator driver's license
POE.....	Point of Entry
POI .....	Province Of Issue
POX.....	Point of Exit
POSSIBLE .....	Possible suspect or possible suspect vehicle



PR.....	Property Reference (Keyholder)
PRIME .....	Police Records Information Management Environment
PSAP .....	Primary/Public Safety Answering Point (9-1-1)
PTSD .....	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
Queue .....	A stored arrangement of calls or data waiting to be processed
RCC.....	Regional Communications Centre, or Regional Correctional Centre, or Report To Crown Counsel
RCMP.....	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RDE.....	Regional District employee
REG #.....	Regimental number
Repo .....	Repossession of property
RES .....	Residence
RMS .....	Records Management System (e.g. PRIME)
RO .....	Registered Owner
Routine .....	No lights/no sirens
RSD .....	Roadside Screening Device
RTMC .....	Regional Transportation Management Centre
RUNNER .....	Property reference, or person who is an escape risk
SAR.....	Search and Rescue
SD.....	Sudden Death
SIP .....	Subject Of Importance, Special Interest To Police
SLIM JIM.....	Tool used to open locked vehicle doors
SNME.....	Surname

SOC.....	Subject of Complaint
SOG.....	Standard Operating Guidelines
SOP .....	Standard Operating Procedure
SR.....	Selective Routing of 9-1-1 calls based on location
SSAP .....	Secondary Safety Answering Point
SUI .....	Still Under Investigation
SUS / SUSP.....	Suspect
SWAT .....	Special Weapons and Tactics (USA)
TACT TROOP .....	Tactical troop used for riots
TAG .....	Valtag/decal on vehicle license plate
TCH.....	Trans-Canada Highway
TDD .....	Telecommunication Device for the Deaf
TOP .....	Temporary Operating Permit
TOW .....	Tow truck
TRS .....	Telecommunications Relay Service
TTY.....	Teletypewriter for the deaf
U/F .....	Unknown female
U/K.....	Unknown
U/M.....	Unknown Male
Uncertainty.....	The mathematically derived statistical estimate, expressed in metres, indicating the distance of the cellular phone from the cell tower.
UAL .....	Unlawfully At Large
UFN.....	Until Further Notice
VALTAG .....	Decal/tag on vehicle license plate
VDT .....	Video Display Terminal
VEH .....	Vehicle

- VIC..... Victim
- VIN..... Vehicle Identification Number
- VIP ..... Very Important Person (security)
- VLAN..... Virtual LAN
- VoIP ..... Voice-over Internet Protocol
- VRS ..... Video Relay Service
- VSA..... Vital Signs Absent
- WAGON ..... Prisoner wagon
- WAN ..... Wide Area Network
- Wi-Fi ..... Wireless Fidelity
- WIT ..... Witness
- WRECKER ..... Tow truck
- WSP ..... Wireless Service Provider