911 Liability

Telecommunicators play a critical role in public safety, and the decisions made during emergency calls can have significant legal and operational consequences. This course provides a comprehensive examination of liability in the emergency communications environment, including individual responsibility, agency obligations, and the standards that guide professional practice.

Learners explore legal concepts, duty of care, workplace conduct, and federal compliance requirements. Real-world cases, structured call-handling principles, documentation practices, and ethical decision-making strategies help learners reduce liability risk while supporting the safety of callers, responders, and the community.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Explain key legal concepts related to telecommunicator and agency liability, including duty to act, negligence, breach of duty, and standard of care.
2. Differentiate between individual and agency liability, including supervisor responsibilities and vicarious liability principles.
3. Apply structured call-handling models, guided flexibility, and priority-based decision-making to reduce legal and safety risks.
4. Evaluate real-world incidents to identify liability triggers and lessons learned related to professionalism, documentation, protocol adherence, and caller support.
5. Demonstrate behaviors and communication practices that promote compliance, fairness, accessibility, and public trust in emergency services.

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Modules

Module 1: Liability and You

This module introduces the concept of liability in the emergency communications environment and explains how telecommunicators' decisions and actions influence legal exposure. Learners explore duty to act, negligence, standard of care, breach of duty, causation, and individual responsibility. Real-world examples and case videos illustrate how mistakes, whether intentional, careless, or due to deviation from protocols, can lead to civil litigation or disciplinary action.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Define key liability concepts including duty to act, negligence, breach of duty, and standard of care.
2. Distinguish between simple negligence and gross negligence using real-world examples.
3. Assess scenarios for liability risk based on caller information, telecommunicator actions, and adherence to standard of care.
4. Identify individual practices that reduce liability exposure, including adherence to protocols, maintaining situational awareness, and appropriate documentation.

Content/Activities

- Video*: Dispatcher Sends Firemen to Wrong Street*. Reflects simple negligence involving misdirected resources and delayed response.
- Video: *Ambulance Sent to Incorrect Address*. Illustrates human error and the importance of verifying caller information to reduce risk.
- Video: *Child Calls 911 for Help with His Mother*. Demonstrates the duty to act and potential consequences of failure to assist a vulnerable caller.
- Video: *Dispatcher Fails to Send a Cruiser*. Showcases a breach of duty and failure to respond to an in-progress incident.

- Video: *Unanswered Calls*. Highlights abandonment, lack of response, and resulting liability exposure.
- Brainteasers (6)**.** Multiple-choice questions to reinforce legal concepts, negligence types, breach of duty categories, proximate cause, and damages.

Module 2: Liability and You: Examples

This module reinforces foundational liability concepts through real-world case examples. Learners review high-risk call scenarios involving crimes in progress, failure to notify responders of hazards, improper call classification, and abandonment. Each example highlights how telecommunicator decision-making, situational awareness, and adherence to protocol impact public safety and legal exposure. The module emphasizes the importance of identifying threats, updating responders, recognizing public hazards, and maintaining duty of care throughout the call.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Analyze scenarios to determine whether a crime may be in progress using ability, immediacy, and means (AIM).
2. Evaluate liability risks associated with delayed or incorrect response, incomplete information sharing, or lack of scene awareness.
3. Apply duty-to-act and abandonment principles to determine appropriate call-handling actions.
4. Identify actions telecommunicators can take to reduce liability in high-risk call situations, including reassessment, updates to responders, and adherence to SOPs/protocols.

Content/Activities

- Video: *Caller Reports Threats from Boyfriend*. Demonstrates the need to evaluate threats using ability, immediacy, and means (AIM) and recognize potential crimes in progress.
- Video**:** *Failure to Inform Responders*. Illustrates the consequences when critical threat information (e.g., armed suspect) is not communicated to responders.

- Video**:** *Man Dies After Ten 911 Calls*. Shows how failure to follow duty-to-act responsibilities and abandonment can contribute to preventable tragedy and liability.
- Brainteasers (5): Multiple-choice questions to reinforce the concepts of ability/immediacy/means, a duty to act, recognizing a crime in progress, abandonment and adherence to policy.

Module 3: Liability and the Agency

This module explains agency-level liability in emergency communications and how organizational decisions, policies, and culture influence legal exposure. Learners examine vicarious liability, supervisory responsibilities, and federal requirements such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The module emphasizes the importance of clear expectations, comprehensive training, fair workplace practices, and proactive supervision to reduce risk. Learners explore how agency standards, staffing, and workplace conduct contribute to a safe, compliant, and legally defensible communications environment.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Explain vicarious liability and supervisory responsibilities within an Emergency Communications Center (ECC).
2. Identify organizational practices that help reduce agency liability, including hiring, training, supervision, and policy maintenance.
3. Describe ADA requirements and their impact on hiring, retention, and workplace accommodation.
4. Evaluate workplace behaviors and conditions that contribute to a respectful, legally compliant environment.

Content/Activities

- Video: *Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace*. Introduces workplace harassment and discrimination concepts and outlines how they relate to agency liability and employee conduct.

- Video**:** *Effects of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace*. Illustrates the impact of harassment on employees and reinforces the need for proactive prevention and enforcement.
- Brainteasers (4): Multiple-choice questions to reinforce the concepts of Vicarious liability, ADA compliance, training and SOP requirements, agency responsibility, and liability definition.

Module 4: Liability and the Agency: Examples

This module expands on agency-level liability by examining real-world incidents where emergency communication center practices contributed to legal and operational consequences. Learners review examples involving scene safety awareness, failure to gather critical information, inappropriate employee behavior, translation and accessibility challenges, and improper handling of 911 hang-up calls. Each scenario reinforces how organizational standards, telecommunicator conduct, and adherence to protocol work together to promote safety and reduce liability exposure for both individuals and the agency.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Analyze real incidents to identify agency and supervisory liability risks, including prior misconduct and failure to enforce expectations.
2. Apply victim-focused questioning and scene-safety techniques to ensure accurate situational awareness.
3. Evaluate communication barriers and recognize when interpreter services or text-to-911 are required to meet legal and ADA obligations.
4. Identify protocol requirements for 911 hang-ups and disconnections to prevent negligence and abandonment.

Content/Activities

- Video*: Police Man Killed in Home*. Demonstrates why verifying who is on scene and gathering complete descriptions protects responders, callers, and bystanders.

- Video: *Dispatchers File Lawsuit*. Highlights workplace conduct, supervision, and agency accountability for employee actions.
- Video: *Dispatcher Hangs Up on Spanish-speaking Caller*. Demonstrates the impact of failing to use interpreter services and the risks associated with language-barrier calls.
- Video: *Failure to Follow-up After Call Disconnected*. Reinforces policies for 911 hang-ups and importance of follow-through to avoid abandonment.
- Brainteasers (4)**.** Multiple-choice questions to reinforce the importance of scene safety assessment, vicarious liability, translation/text-to-911 access, hang-up protocol, and agency-level responsibility.

Module 5: Call Handling

This module provides a step-by-step approach to structured emergency call handling and demonstrates how a unified call-taking formula supports consistency, safety, and liability reduction. Learners review core telecommunicator functions, the Initial Survey, establishing the Chief Complaint, asking Primary and Secondary Questions, recognizing Priority Symptoms, and delivering Pre-Arrival Instructions. The content emphasizes guided flexibility and the critical thinking needed to adapt questions while still following standardized protocols. The goal is to ensure telecommunicators collect essential information, prioritize properly, and support responders and callers effectively.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Apply a unified, protocol-driven call handling process from call receipt to closure.
2. Differentiate between Primary and Secondary Questions and explain when each is used to support decision-making.
3. Identify Priority Symptoms and determine when immediate dispatch is required.
4. Demonstrate guided flexibility by modifying question order while maintaining protocol integrity.
5. Explain when and how to deliver Pre-Arrival Instructions to support caller and responder safety.

Content/Activities

- Brainteasers (7): Multiple-choice questions to reinforce the primary functions of the telecommunicator, protocol standards, correct call handling sequence and decision timing.

Course Completion Criteria

To successfully complete this course and earn continuing education hours, learners must achieve a minimum score of 75%. The quiz must be completed within one hour.

- CE Hours awarded: 2
- Certificate duration: 12 Months

Technical Requirements

- Desktop, laptop, or mobile device
- Speakers or headphones
- High-speed Internet access
- A current web browser