Public Safety Telecommunicators Course

The Public Safety Telecommunicator Course provides foundational knowledge and practical principles for professionals responsible for receiving, processing, and dispatching emergency and non-emergency calls for service. The course examines the telecommunicator's roles and responsibilities, professional standards, customer service, interpersonal communication, call processing, emergency communications technology, liability, emergency management, occupational stress, and quality assurance.

Throughout the course, learners examine the importance of diligence, speed, accuracy, professionalism, empathy, responder and caller safety, effective questioning, active listening, and adherence to established protocols and agency procedures. Videos, audio calls, examples, exercises, and brainteasers reinforce concepts and encourage learners to apply course principles to realistic public safety communications situations.

Learning Objectives

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

1. Explain the roles, responsibilities, professional expectations, and standards associated with public safety telecommunications.
2. Apply effective customer service, interpersonal communication, active listening, and caller-management techniques.
3. Process emergency and non-emergency calls by gathering, confirming, prioritizing, and communicating critical information.
4. Describe the technologies and communication systems used to receive, locate, process, document, and dispatch emergency calls.
5. Explain liability, Standard of Care, Duty to Act, negligence, and strategies for reducing organizational and individual liability exposure.
6. Describe emergency management principles, ICS, NIMS, COOP, and the telecommunicator's responsibilities during disasters and large-scale incidents.
7. Recognize occupational stress, burnout, critical incident stress, and strategies that support effective stress management.
8. Explain the role of quality assurance, standards, performance measurement, and continuous improvement in emergency communications.

Module 1: Introduction, Roles, and Responsibilities

This module introduces the mission, purpose, and professional responsibilities of the public safety telecommunicator. Learners examine protocols, pre-arrival instructions, responder and caller safety, professional attributes, warning signs, the Reaction Principle, and the emergency communication dispatch process. The module emphasizes the telecommunicator's position as the first person on the scene and the importance of obtaining and relaying accurate information while protecting victims, callers, responders, and evidence.

Module Objectives

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

1. Explain the mission, purpose, roles, and responsibilities of the public safety telecommunicator.
2. Describe how protocols and pre-arrival instructions support caller, victim, responder, and bystander safety.
3. Identify professional attributes and expectations associated with successful public safety telecommunications.
4. Apply the emergency communication dispatch process to identify primary and secondary information required during a call.
5. Recognize warning signs, unsafe environments, and other circumstances requiring additional questioning or action.

Content/Activities

- Video: The Dispatcher
- Video: Emergency Call Center
- Brainteasers: Roles and Responsibilities
- Video: 911 Laughs at Caller
- Audio: Domestic Violence Good Dispatcher
- Audio Call Analysis: Judy White vs. Coral Springs, Evasive Caller, and Ruth Price
- Video: Emergency Medical Dispatch
- Brainteasers: Departmental and Public Expectations

Module 2: Delivering Customer Service

This module examines customer service within the public safety environment and emphasizes the telecommunicator's role as an accessible representative of the agency. Learners explore customer expectations, empathy and apathy, professionalism, telephone etiquette, diplomatic call transfers, difficult callers, assertiveness, and the influence of attitude on service delivery.

Module Objectives

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

1. Define customer service and explain its importance within public safety communications.
2. Apply reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and other principles that promote customer satisfaction.
3. Differentiate between empathetic and apathetic behaviors and identify factors that may influence each.
4. Demonstrate professional telephone etiquette and techniques for diplomatically transferring and managing calls.
5. Apply professional strategies for handling rude, difficult, or emotionally challenging callers while maintaining control of the interaction.

Content/Activities

- Customer Service and Agency Image Review
- Video: Customer Service for Public Sector
- Empathy and Apathy Self-Reflection
- Professional Approach and Continuous Improvement Review
- Brainteasers: Customer Service and Professionalism
- Telephone Etiquette and Call Transfer Scenarios
- Difficult Caller and Assertiveness Scenarios
- Brainteasers: Etiquette, Attitude, and Rude Callers

Module 3: Interpersonal Communications

This module focuses on the communication skills required for effective emergency call handling. Learners examine active listening, barriers to listening, telephone voice personality, inflection, tone, communication barriers, and techniques for communicating with callers of different ages and abilities. Particular attention is given to patience and adaptability when communicating with children and elderly callers.

Module Objectives

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

1. Apply effective call-handling practices that demonstrate courtesy, confidence, concern, and control.
2. Differentiate between hearing and active listening and identify common barriers to effective listening.
3. Use volume, enunciation, inflection, rate, and tone to improve telephone communication.
4. Identify language, emotional, physical, and direct barriers that may interfere with interpersonal communication.
5. Adapt communication techniques to effectively interact with child and elderly callers.

Content/Activities

- Listening Skills Self-Test
- Video: Clear Communication
- Video: Public Speaking
- Video: Tone of Voice
- Video: 911 Dispatcher Award Presentation
- Audio: Child Caller Homicide
- Communication Techniques Review
- Brainteasers: Interpersonal Communication

Module 4: Call Processing

This module provides an extensive examination of the call-processing responsibilities of public safety telecommunicators. Learners practice obtaining and confirming essential information, using the 6 W's, classifying calls, gathering descriptions, avoiding tunnel vision, listening to background information, controlling conversations, adapting questions to caller circumstances, managing challenging callers, protecting caller safety, anticipating events, and appropriately closing calls.

Module Objectives

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

1. Apply the 6 W's and appropriate interview techniques to gather, organize, and confirm essential call information.
2. Distinguish among in-progress, just-occurred, and cold calls and identify information required for each.
3. Use active listening, inverted visualization, descriptions, background noise, voice control, and effective questioning to gather pertinent information.
4. Adapt call-processing techniques when communicating with hysterical callers, children, elderly callers, and callers experiencing mental health concerns.
5. Apply caller-safety, pre-arrival, anticipation, responder-update, and call-closure principles according to the circumstances of an incident.

Content/Activities

- Audio/Video: Location, Address Confirmation, and Call Classification Examples
- Brainteasers: Basic Interview Techniques and the 6 W's
- Inverted Visualization, Person, and Vehicle Description Exercises
- Audio Exercises: Active Listening, Background Noise, Open Lines, and Question Phrasing
- Challenging Caller Audio Scenarios and Brainteasers
- Videos: Caller Safety, Escape, Hiding, and Conflicting Directives
- Anticipating Events and Caller-Safety Scenarios
- Call Closure Review

Module 5: Emergency Communications Technology

This module traces the development of emergency communications from early telephone systems to Enhanced 911, wireless communications, VoIP, GPS/GIS, Next Generation 911, Computer Aided Dispatch, and related public safety technologies. Learners examine the strengths and limitations of location technology and the continuing importance of geographic knowledge and effective caller questioning.

Module Objectives

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

1. Describe the development of 911 and the evolution of emergency communications technology.
2. Explain ANI/ALI, E911, wireless Phase 1 and Phase 2, VoIP, and emergency call-routing concepts.
3. Apply available location technologies and geographic knowledge to assist in locating callers.
4. Explain the purpose, capabilities, and operational impacts of Next Generation 911.
5. Describe how CAD and other public safety technologies support call taking, dispatching, responder tracking, documentation, and information sharing.

Content/Activities

- Video: State of the Art 911 Center
- Brainteasers: History of 911
- Video: VoIP and 911
- Brainteasers: Emergency Communication Systems
- Wireless Caller Location Case Studies and Car Submerging Audio
- GPS/GIS, Mapping, Topographical Map, and Inverted Communication Exercises
- Next Generation 911 Review
- Video: CAD and Technology Brainteasers

Module 6: Liability

This module introduces legal and professional liability considerations in emergency communications. Learners examine ways dispatchers and agencies may incur liability, workplace sexual harassment, Duty to Act, the elements required to establish negligence, inappropriate response, Standard of Care, and organizational strategies for reducing liability exposure.

Module Objectives

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

1. Define liability and identify actions or omissions that may create liability exposure for telecommunicators and agencies.
2. Recognize sexual harassment and explain organizational responsibilities for prevention and corrective action.
3. Explain Duty to Act and its relationship to emergency call handling.
4. Identify the four conditions used to establish negligence: duty, breach of duty, injury or damage, and proximate cause.
5. Describe individual and agency practices that can reduce liability exposure and support the current Standard of Care.

Content/Activities

- Liability and Standard of Care Review
- Sexual Harassment and Prevention Scenarios
- Video: Wrong Address
- Negligence Case Analysis
- Audio: No Police Sent to Protect Caller
- Agency Liability-Reduction Practices
- Video: Caller Refuses to Do CPR
- Liability Brainteasers

Module 7: Emergency Management

This module examines the telecommunicator's responsibilities during emergencies, disasters, and large-scale incidents. Learners study the four phases of emergency management, Emergency Operations Centers, the Incident Command System, NIMS, integrated communications, Continuity of Operations Planning, disasters of nature, cascading effects, disaster call volume, caller hysteria, and the importance of preparedness and interoperable communication.

Module Objectives

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

1. Explain the four phases of emergency management and the local, state, and federal progression of disaster response.
2. Describe the purpose, structure, components, and functional areas of ICS and the telecommunicator's role within the system.
3. Explain NIMS principles and the importance of common terminology, integrated communications, accountability, and interoperability.
4. Describe the purpose, objectives, implementation, and operational requirements of a Continuity of Operations Plan.
5. Apply emergency communication principles to disasters, high call volumes, resource limitations, caller hysteria, and cascading hazards.

Content/Activities

- Video: Preparing Makes Sense
- Emergency Operations Center and ICS Review
- Video: NIMS
- COOP Planning Scenarios and Plan Template Review
- Disaster of Nature and Cascading Effects Scenarios
- Video: Flash Floods
- Video: Disaster Calls
- Disaster Communication Brainteasers

Module 8: Stress Management

This module explores the occupational and personal stress experienced by public safety telecommunicators. Learners examine types and causes of stress, immediate and long-term effects, burnout, stress-management techniques, critical incident stress, Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, PTSD, and approaches to treatment and support.

Module Objectives

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

1. Define stress and differentiate among anticipatory, chronic, residual, and situational stress.
2. Identify behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and physiological effects of short- and long-term stress.
3. Recognize environmental and operational stressors and the four stages of burnout.
4. Apply practical stress-management and stress-reduction strategies appropriate to public safety telecommunications.
5. Recognize critical incident stress and PTSD symptoms and describe available approaches to peer support, debriefing, professional referral, and treatment.

Content/Activities

- Video: Day in the Life of a Dispatcher
- Exhaustion Exercise
- Environmental and Operational Stressor Review
- Video: Staying Positive at Work
- Stress Management and Reduction Exercises
- Video: Critical Incident Stress
- Critical Incident Stress and PTSD Review
- Stress Management Brainteasers

Module 9: Quality Assurance

This module introduces quality assurance as a systematic process for determining whether emergency communications services meet specified requirements and standards. Learners examine timeliness, quality standards, measurable performance, qualitative and quantitative measures, benchmarking, systematic assessment, and continuous performance improvement. The module uses practical examples to connect performance data with agency standards, policies, procedures, training, and operational decision-making.

Module Objectives

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

1. Define quality assurance, quality, standards, and benchmarking within an emergency communications environment.
2. Explain the relationship among standards, policies, procedures, performance expectations, and quality service.
3. Differentiate between qualitative and quantitative approaches to measuring performance.
4. Apply standardized metrics and systematic assessment principles to evaluate emergency communications performance.
5. Explain how performance measurement and benchmarking can reduce variance and support continuous improvement.

Content/Activities

- Timeliness of Response Review
- Smithville 911 Quality Assurance Scenario
- Quality Assurance Terms and Concepts
- Qualitative and Quantitative Measurement Examples
- Benchmarking Exercise
- Standards, Policies, and Procedures Review
- Metrics and Systematic Assessment
- Continuous Performance Improvement Activities

Course Summary

The Public Safety Telecommunicator Course prepares learners to understand the broad professional responsibilities associated with emergency communications. Across the course, learners progress from foundational roles and professional expectations to customer service, communication, call processing, technology, liability, emergency management, personal wellness, and organizational quality assurance.

The course consistently reinforces several principles central to effective public safety telecommunications: obtain and confirm accurate information, protect callers and responders, communicate professionally, remain alert to changing circumstances, follow established protocols and agency policies, use technology as a tool rather than a substitute for sound judgment, prepare for unusual and large-scale events, manage occupational stress, and continually evaluate performance to improve service.

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: 7
- Certificate duration: 12 Months

Technical Requirements

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