

Bureau of Emergency Communications

9-1-1 Press Release

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For Immediate Release

September 11, 2009

9-1-1 Emergency Number Day

Annual Telecommunicator Recognition Day

September 11th is the date nationally recognized as 9-1-1 Emergency Number Day and recognizes 9-1-1 Telecommunicators across the country. The day was first proclaimed by President Ronald Reagan in 1987 (see attached page) and has been celebrated ever since, despite the events of September 11, 2001, also known as nine-eleven.

The Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC), located in Portland, Oregon, handles nearly one million 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls for all of Multnomah - County. With one hundred and nine certified dispatchers and call takers and another six trainees, each Emergency Telecommunicator handles roughly 8,700 calls each year. That's 8,700 opportunities to help someone, 8,700 chances to make a difference, and 8,700 lives that can be affected.

9-1-1 Telecommunicators are true "First Responders." They help people give birth, stop the bleeding, stay safe until help arrives, provide CPR instructions, help people find resolution to problems and crimes, and so much more before emergency crews arrive on scene. Dispatchers work in stressful situations and oftentimes help people on the absolute worst day of their lives. Through it all, they come back to work day after day because they want to help people.

9-1-1 Emergency Number Day is an opportunity for a grateful community to recognize the tremendous contributions our 9-1-1 dispatchers and call takers add to our quality of life each and every day. Please take a moment to recognize the 9-1-1 Telecommunicators throughout the Metropolitan area who provide life-saving services to the community on a daily basis.

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The President Proclamation 5696 of August 26, 1987
August 31, 1987

By the President of the United States of America - A Proclamation

Protecting the lives and property of citizens is one of government's fundamental responsibilities. In times of emergency, citizens must have a quick and easy way to summon police and other rescue services. The 9-1-1 emergency telephone number fulfills this need and proves its value hundreds of times every day throughout our country.

In 1968, 9-1-1 was designated the universal emergency telephone number in North America. Today we can see with satisfaction that much has been done to implement this system. Thousands of municipalities have established the 9-1-1 telephone system, making it possible to save more lives and to increase the public's confidence in local emergency response systems. The 9-1-1 system has enabled communities to respond to a greater number of emergency calls with added efficiency and lower costs to the public.

State and local governments have made a commitment to implement the 9-1-1 telephone system across our Nation as soon as possible. Some States have mandated that the system be operational by a certain date, while others have made much progress on a voluntary basis. These efforts to enhance the welfare and safety of our citizens deserve public recognition and every commendation.

The Congress, by Public Law 99-448, has designated September 11, 1987, as "9-1-1 Emergency Number Day" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this occasion.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim September 11, 1987, as 9-1-1 Emergency Number Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-sixth day of August, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan

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A Tribute To Dispatchers

By Chief Thomas Wagoner

Loveland (Colo.) Police Department

Someone once asked me if I thought that answering telephones for a living was a profession. I said, "I thought it was a calling."

And so is dispatching. I have found in my law enforcement career that dispatchers are the unsung heroes of public safety. They miss the excitement of riding in a speeding car with lights flashing and sirens wailing. They can only hear of the bright orange flames leaping from a burning building. They do not get to see the joy on the face of worried parents as they see their child begin breathing on its own, after it has been given CPR.

Dispatchers sit in darkened rooms looking at computer screens and talking to voices from faces they never see. It's like reading a lot of books, but only half of each one.

Dispatchers connect the anxious conversations of terrified victims, angry informants, suicidal citizens and grouchy officers. They are the calming influence of all of them-the quiet, competent voices in the night that provide the pillars for the bridges of sanity and safety. They are expected to gather information from highly agitated people who can't remember where they live, what their name is, or what they just saw. And then, they are to calmly provide all that information to the officers, firefighters, or paramedics without error the first time and every time.

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Dispatchers are expected to be able to do five things at once-and do them well. While questioning a frantic caller, they must type the information into a computer, tip off another dispatcher, put another caller on hold, and listen to an officer run a plate for a parking problem. To miss the plate numbers is to raise the officer's ire; to miss the caller's information may be to endanger the same officer's life. But, the officer will never understand that.

Dispatchers have two constant companions, other dispatchers and stress. They depend on one, and try to ignore the other. They are chastened by upset callers, taken for granted by the public, and criticized by the officers. The rewards they get are inexpensive and infrequent, except for the satisfaction they feel at the end of a shift, having done what they were expected to do.

Dispatchers come in all shapes and sizes, all races, both sexes, and all ages. They are blondes, and brunettes, and redheads. They are quiet and outgoing, single, or married, plain, beautiful, or handsome. No two are alike, yet they are all the same.

They are people who were selected in a difficult hiring process to do an impossible job. They are as different as snowflakes, but they have one thing in common. They care about people and they enjoy being the lifeline of society-that steady voice in a storm-the one who knows how to handle every emergency and does it with style and grace; and, uncompromised competence.

Dispatchers play many roles: therapist, doctor, lawyer, teacher, weatherman, guidance counselor, psychologist, priest, secretary, supervisor, politician, and reporter. And few people must jump through the emotional hoops on the trip through the joy of one caller's birthday party, to the fear of another caller's burglary in progress, to the anger of a neighbor blocked in their drive, and back to the birthday caller all in a two-minute

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time frame. The emotional roller coaster rolls to a stop after an 8 or 10 hour shift, and they are expected to walk down to their car with steady feet and no queasiness in their stomach-because they are dispatchers. If they hold it in, they are too closed. If they talk about it, they are a whiner. If it bothers them, it adds more stress. If it doesn't, they question themselves, wondering why.

Dispatchers are expected to have:

- the compassion of Mother Theresa
- the wisdom of Solomon
- the interviewing skills of Oprah Winfrey
- the gentleness of Florence Nightingale
- the patience of Job
- the voice of Barbara Streisand
- the knowledge of Einstein
- the answers of Ann Landers
- the humor of David Letterman
- the investigative skills of Sgt. Joe Friday
- the looks of Melanie Griffith or Don Johnson
- the faith of Billy Graham
- the energy of Charo
- and the endurance of the Energizer Bunny

Is it any wonder that many drop out during training? It is a unique and talented person who can do this job and do it well. And, it is fitting and proper that we take a few minutes or hours this week to honor you for the job that each of you do. That recognition is overdue and it is insufficient. But, it is sincere.

I have tried to do your job, and I have failed. It takes a special person with unique skills. I admire you and I thank you for the thankless job you do. You are heroes, and I am proud to work with you.

[Chief Wagoner wrote this piece in 1994 in connection with National Telecommunicator Week. He has graciously allowed us to post it here