



Date: September 10, 2018
To: Patrick H. West, City Manager *T.M.W.*
From: *R.H.* Reginald Harrison, Director of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications
For: Mayor and Members of the City Council
Subject: September – Disaster Preparedness Month

September is National Disaster Preparedness Month, and the Department of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications has prepared a host of community events. The Department will participate in outreach events with the Long Beach Unified School District, including Back to School Night, and with resident groups to inform participants of the importance of being prepared for major emergencies and disasters. Some of the events scheduled from September through October include:

- September 10th – Map Your Neighborhood Meeting – Grant Neighborhood Association
- September 15th - Ready Long Beach Emergency Preparedness Expo
- October 18th - Great California ShakeOut – Earthquake Drill

Additionally, attached is a recent news article that summarizes the City's disaster preparedness recent accomplishments and highlights the important role that Public Safety Dispatchers play in our emergency response system.

Information on other disaster preparedness topics is available on the City's Disaster Preparedness website at www.longbeach.gov/disasterpreparedness. Staff is also available to discuss disaster preparedness programs at community meetings. Please contact Reggie Harrison, Director of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications, at (562) 570-9460 for additional information.

Attachment

Cc: CHARLES PARKIN, CITY ATTORNEY
LAURA L. DOUD, CITY AUDITOR
TOM MODICA, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER
KEVIN JACKSON, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
REBECCA GARNER, ASSISTANT TO THE CITY MANAGER
DEPARTMENT HEADS

Filed under [Commentary](#)

Commentary: “9-1-1, what’s your emergency?”

Reggie Harrison, City of Long Beach Director of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications • September 6, 2018 • [Leave a Comment](#)

REGGIE HARRISON



*City of Long
Beach Director of
Disaster
Preparedness
and Emergency
Communications*

On Feb. 16, 2018, the nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first 9-1-1 call. Remember back in the day when you called 9-1-1 to ask the time of day or the day of the week and even for help with homework (you know who you are)? Those days are long over. Today, Long Beach Public Safety Dispatchers (PSDs) are fully integrated into our emergency-response system, perform highly technical work and provide quality customer service to our residents and our police, fire and emergency-medical personnel.

Keeping up with the times

In October, 2003, the City of Long Beach cut the ribbon on a 42,000 square-foot, two-story Emergency Communications and Operations Center (ECOC). This state-of-the-art facility provided a central location for first-responders, management staff, utility operators and others to manage large-scale disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis and terrorist activities. The new ECOC was also designed to co-locate the Police 9-1-1 Communications Center (PCC) and the Fire 9-1-1 Communications Center (FCC) under the same roof for the first time. The coupling of these unique functions has since evolved into the City’s Department of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications. The department aligns Long Beach with a growing demand for integrated public-safety services at the county, state and federal levels.

Integrated emergency-response network

PSDs are the first voices residents hear when they call for emergency services from police, fire and emergency-medical personnel. In 2017, our 80 PSDs answered over 800,000 calls for service and dispatched over 300,000 personnel to emergency incidents. Even with such a large volume, 90 percent of those emergency calls for service were answered within 10 seconds, as set forth by industry standards. With an increasing call volume and co-location of the PSDs at the ECOC, the City recognized an opportunity to consolidate many of the job functions of the previously separated PCC and FCC dispatchers. Cross training and consolidation of PSDs expands the department’s capacity to handle large call volumes and is a service-delivery improvement that eliminates the need to transfer calls for police, fire or emergency-medical services.

During large city events, such as the Grand Prix of Long Beach, or when faced with major disasters and emergency responses, trained tactical dispatchers join first-responder teams as part of a coordinated public-safety response, working side by side with first responders in mobile command-post vehicles to provide dedicated emergency communications. Additionally, dispatcher supervisors are trained to send emergency-notification messages to the public to inform them of actions they should take to protect their family and property during a disaster.

Updated technology

Since the construction of the ECOC 15 years ago, it has become necessary to replace major emergency-communications systems and introduce new systems used to communicate with residents and first responders, a challenging undertaking with the around-the-clock nature of emergency calls for service. Earlier this year, the City replaced and upgraded the 9-1-1 telephone system without an interruption in service. We also upgraded the Public Safety Dispatch radio system, including consoles, microwave network and the core system with new up-to-date technology. Compatible with other county law and fire agencies, the upgraded equipment allows for interoperable communications and coordination within the region in the event of a disaster.

Earlier this year, the City implemented Text-to-9-1-1 to provide equal access to emergency services for residents who are hearing and/or speech impaired, and for those in situations where it is too dangerous to dial 9-1-1 for assistance. "Call if you can– text if you can't" is the slogan developed for this new emergency-communications technology.

AlertLongBeach, the City's emergency mass-notification system, was upgraded to be able to send emergency alert messages in accessible formats. This upgrade made Long Beach the first city in Los Angeles County to provide emergency alert messages to residents who are deaf, blind or hard of hearing. All residents are urged to sign up for AlertLongBeach at longbeach.gov/disasterpreparedness.

So, what's next?

The work of 9-1-1 dispatchers has changed significantly over the past 50 years, and additional changes are expected in the future (such as the ability to send videos and photos to 9-1-1). But, what will not change is the dedication and professionalism of our dispatchers. PSDs move seamlessly throughout their work day, from speaking with residents on the telephone and inputting data into a computer to dispatching emergency personnel via radio to the scene of an incident. 9-1-1 dispatchers are highly trained to elicit pertinent information from callers to support and provide up-to-date information to first responders in the field. They provide a calming voice and demeanor to a sometimes extremely chaotic situation. 9-1-1 dispatchers do this all with a sincere understanding that every emergency call is important and requires their full attention, skills and knowledge.

Reggie Harrison is a Long Beach resident and the director of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications for the City of Long Beach.