



City of San Antonio

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AUDIT COMMITTEE SUMMARY

January 17, 2017

Audit of 9-1-1 Operations and Response Time Reporting

Report Issued December 21, 2016

Background

In January 1987, the City joined the Bexar Metro 9-1-1 Network District (BM911). BM911 maintains a 9-1-1 emergency communication system that enables citizens in Bexar, Comal, and Guadalupe counties to quickly reach the appropriate Police or Fire Department. BM911 provides the City with computers, software, and support for the 9-1-1 call process. These services are provided at no charge to the City, as BM911 is funded through the 'Texas State 9-1-1 Fee' charged to citizens via phone bills. The monthly fees range from 22 cents for a residential land line to 50 cents for a cellular phone.

The City's 9-1-1 call center is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to assist the public by taking calls and dispatching emergency services. The call center is staffed with Police and Fire Department personnel who operate independently but are co-located at the same call center facility. In most instances 9-1-1 calls are initially answered and screened by the Police Department call takers. When callers require assistance from the Fire Department, they are transferred to a Fire Department call taker.

Call center personnel are responsible for answering calls quickly, recording information accurately, and dispatching resources effectively. The City's call center received over 1.5 million 9-1-1 emergency calls, and over 1 million non-emergency calls during calendar year 2015 (over 7,000 calls per day on average).

Audit Objectives

- Determine if the City's 9-1-1 call answering process is properly managed.
- Determine if the Police and Fire Departments' response times are accurately calculated and properly reported.

Audit Scope & Methodology

The audit scope was from October 2014 through January 2016. We reviewed City Administrative Directives; Fire Department (SAFD), Police Department (SAPD), and Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) policies and procedures; Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) requirements; and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Security Policies. We also examined National Emergency Number Association (NENA) standards and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards. Additionally, we compared City 9-1-1 call center staffing and service levels to generally accepted emergency answering standards.

We also interviewed management and staff from ITSD, SAPD, SAFD, and external organizations to gain an understanding of 9-1-1 call center operations and public safety response time processes.

Audit Conclusions

Call Center Operations

Generally, the City's 9-1-1 call answering process is properly managed. However, we identified the following areas that the Police and Fire Departments should address to further strengthen existing controls and processes surrounding the 9-1-1 call answering process.

Jointly, the Police and Fire Departments should:

- Develop, document, and test a business continuity plan for the 9-1-1 call center.
- Develop an aggressive outreach plan to educate the public on appropriate use of 9-1-1 and non-emergency numbers.
- Formalize responsibilities, expectations, obligations, and the nature of their arrangement with Bexar Metro 9-1-1 through a defined service level agreement or memorandum of understanding.

The Police Chief should:

- Evaluate and adjust staffing levels and schedules to meet NENA call answering standards for emergency calls and internal standards for non-emergency calls.
- Verify that every employee working in the call center has completed the required FBI CJIS security awareness training. Also, develop and maintain a sufficient documentation process (including backup records) of all required training.
- Develop and implement a call quality review process that: 1) regularly reviews calls for compliance with standards, and 2) provides feedback on a regular basis to individual call takers.

The Fire Chief should:

- Evaluate and formally adopt a standard such as the NENA standard for call taking operations.
- Evaluate and adjust staffing levels and schedules to meet the NENA call answering standards for emergency calls and internal goals for non-emergency calls.
- Develop a process to periodically (at least every five years) perform background checks on existing personnel working in the 9-1-1 call center.
- Develop and implement a call quality review process that: 1) regularly reviews calls for compliance to

standards, and 2) provides feedback on a regular basis to individual call takers.

- Develop a plan to balance the cost of call takers and dispatchers with the need to provide professional medical and fire call taking and dispatching.

Police and Fire Response Time Reporting

Generally, the Police and Fire Departments' response times are accurately calculated and properly reported based on current departmental reporting models.

However, we make the following recommendations to further enhance the transparency and accuracy of the Police and Fire Departments' response time reporting process.

The Police Chief should:

- Expand the police response time definition of an emergency to include all life-threatening events.
- Expand the categories of response times reported (i.e. life-threatening, non-life-threatening in progress, non-life-threatening, other service requests, etc.).

The Fire Chief should

- Track and report the average initial answer and Police call process times for medical and fire related calls as an element of the Fire Department's response time reporting to the public.

SAPD, SAFD, and ITSD management developed management responses and corrective action plans.