

RESPONSIVE

A News Brief of Tarrant County 9-1-1 District



In This Issue

- Text Messaging...Does Anyone Talk Anymore?
- What is Sunset?
- Training - A Substantial Return On Investment
- Grapevine Parade of Lights



Return on Investment



Training can provide a substantial return on investment as is evidenced by TC9-1-1's **Recruit, Hire, Train, and Retain Program**. See story inside.



Tarrant County 9-1-1 District
2600 Airport Freeway
Fort Worth, Texas 76111

RESPONSIVE is a publication of the Tarrant County 9-1-1 District. Its purpose is to inform and educate those who are served by the district. Any contribution in the form of articles, comments or questions may be submitted to the editor, Alisa Simmons.

To receive future **RESPONSIVE** News Briefs, please contact Alisa Simmons, Manager of Public Marketing at (817) 820-1189 or asimmons@tc911-org.

News Briefs are also available electronically in Adobe Acrobat PDF format.

A Message From The Executive Director



Text Messaging... Does Anyone Talk Anymore?

by Greg Petrey, Executive Director

A few weeks ago, I overheard a Rotary member telling the story of a young woman that was visiting the Holocaust Museum the day of the recent shooting. This young lady dove for cover and began texting her friends on her cell phone. From media reports, they carried on quite a string of messages back and forth. Text messaging is the way today's young people communicate. As I recently reviewed my own monthly cell phone statement, I saw that my 18-year old daughter participated in over 12,000 text messaging sessions, while only using a handful of voice minutes.

Texting is here to stay. My colleagues in the emergency communications industry and I, have our plate full as we prepare for the emerging role that texting will play in 9-1-1 system redesign.

9-1-1 is more than a phone number; it is technology. 9-1-1 is telephony. Our primary responsibility at the Tarrant County 9-1-1 District is to ensure that your emergency call is delivered to the proper 9-1-1 call center. Sound simple? When is technology ever simple? You can rest assured that 9-1-1 system excellence is achieved 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with the staff of professionals I lead at the 9-1-1 district. My staff's relationships with AT&T, Verizon and the hundreds of other telephone companies that serve our county are crucial in ensuring call delivery excellence. We work closely with the 9-1-1 center managers countywide, elected officials and the public to ensure that everyone from decision-makers to everyday citizens are aware of what's needed to make the 9-1-1 system function as it is designed and their role.

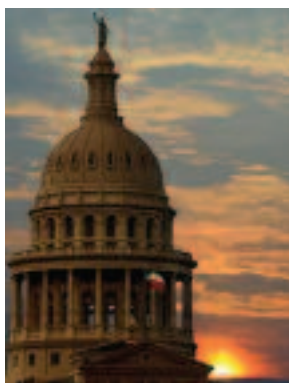
Texting to communicate with the 9-1-1 dispatcher, well, that capability does not exist, yet. Now, you may soon read about trials and studies being conducted regarding texting to 9-1-1, this IS NOT a universal feature as of YET.

This is one of the reasons that the Tarrant County 9-1-1 District is spending more than twenty-five million dollars over the next three to five years to upgrade your 9-1-1 system. The new system, will be able to process text, photographs and video as or with 9-1-1 calls. This is a monumental undertaking that will drastically change not only call delivery but also call processing. This upgrade will require substantial changes to every aspect of 9-1-1 including equipment located on site at each 9-1-1 answering point.

Tarrant County's 9-1-1 service fee has not changed in twenty-five years. If all goes as planned, the equipment in the fifty-one Public Safety Answering Points within the District will be upgraded without raising this service fee. For Tarrant County, this upgrade is an investment in helping 9-1-1 keep pace with the ever expanding communications needs of our citizens of all ages.

What is Sunset?

by Richard Atkins, Assistant Director



What is Sunset? **Sunset** is the regular assessment of the continuing need for a state agency to exist. The Texas Legislature created the **Sunset Advisory Commission** in 1977 to identify and eliminate waste, duplication, and inefficiency in government agencies. The commission seeks public input through hearings on every agency under Sunset review and recommends actions on each agency to the full legislature. In most cases, agencies under Sunset review are automatically abolished unless legislation is enacted to continue them.

The Texas Sunset Act can be found at Section 325.001 of the Texas Government Code.

Agencies under Sunset typically undergo review once every twelve years, with about 20 to 30 agencies going through the Sunset process each legislative session. There are 27 state agencies scheduled for Sunset review during the 2010 - 2011 biennium and two of these are of particular interest to Tarrant County 9-1-1 since each of them has a role in how 9-1-1 services are regulated in Texas.

- Commission on State Emergency Communications
- Public Utility Commission of Texas

While standard legislative oversight is concerned with agency compliance with legislative policies, Sunset asks a more basic question: "Do the agency's functions continue to be needed? The Sunset process works by setting a date on which an agency will be abolished unless legislation is passed to continue its functions. This creates a unique opportunity for the legislature to look closely at each agency and make fundamental changes to an agency's mission or operations if needed.

The Sunset process is guided by a 12-member body appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Assisting the commission is a staff whose reports provide an assessment of an agency's programs, giving the legislature the information needed to draw conclusions about program necessity and workability.

Staff of the Sunset Commission work extensively with each agency under review to evaluate the need for the agency, propose needed statutory or management changes, and develop legislation necessary to implement any proposed changes. The staff review of an agency typically takes from three to eight months depending on the size and complexity of the agency.

As a part of the review process, each agency submits a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) to the Sunset Commission. The SER identifies problems, opportunities, and issues that the agency feels should be considered in the Sunset review. Sunset staff also solicits input from interest groups and professional organizations and encourages public input and discussion of agency functions. Once the evaluation phase of the review is completed, Sunset staff publishes a report containing statutory and management recommendations.

What is Sunset? continued

The Sunset Commission conducts a public hearing on each agency under review after publication of the staff report. The public hearing provides an opportunity for Sunset staff to discuss its recommendations, for the agency to formally respond to the staff recommendations, and for the public to comment on the report and agency operations and policies. This allows for broad public input into the Sunset process and begins the commission's consideration of potential changes to recommend to the legislature in the form of Sunset legislation. All information presented to the commission at the public hearing, whether submitted orally or in writing, is reviewed and compiled. The commission meets to review the input received and to make decisions on whether to abolish an agency or continue it with changes.

The commission's report on an agency must include a recommendation to abolish or continue the agency and may also contain recommendations. If the commission recommends continuation of an agency, the commission must provide draft legislation to the legislature to continue for up to 12 years, and correct other problems identified during the Sunset review.

An agency is automatically abolished unless the legislature passes legislation to continue the agency. If an agency is abolished, the Sunset Act provides for a one-year wind-down period to conclude its operations. The agency retains full authority and responsibility until the end of that year, when all property and records are transferred to an appropriate state agency.

Grapevine Parade of Lights

"The more of us on the Engine, the warmer we're ALL going to be!" That was the rallying cry from Grapevine 9-1-1 Manager Karen Ballard in preparation for the annual Grapevine Parade of Lights. Grapevine 9-1-1 dispatchers along with Tarrant County 9-1-1 District staffers celebrated the holidays aboard the city's vintage Fire Engine on December 3, 2009.



Training – A Substantial Return on Investment

by Wanda McCarley, Operations Group Manager

In today's economic climate, it's challenging to find investments that actually yield good returns. Training is just such an investment. Likewise an investment in hiring the right people and retaining them over the long haul can be a real budget plus. The advantages of a proactive hiring, training and retention program are sometimes overlooked amid other budget issues. As with most public safety issues, it's difficult to count the bad things that didn't happen or the setbacks that didn't occur. The results however, are tangible in terms of budget dollars and financial impact.

Tarrant County 9-1-1 District continues to develop and improve the **Recruit, Hire, Train, and Retain Program** begun in 2008. Pre-hiring testing is available and easily accessible at no cost to Tarrant County PSAPs at the district's office complex. The number of workstations available for testing was expanded in 2009. The training center, which opened in third quarter 2008, is being utilized to provide training to Tarrant County public safety answering points (PSAP) personnel at minimal or no cost. The initial focus was to provide required training. In 2009, the focus expanded to include advanced skills and team building. Convenient registration is now available on the district's website and classes are already booked throughout the 2010 budget year. Yvonne Serl, Tarrant County 9-1-1's PSAP Support and Training coordinator, has focused on finding the best classes and the best instructors. New classes are posted weekly.

Are there dividends to the investments we've made in hiring, training and retention? Many factors contribute to staffing and retention levels, but a recent survey of Tarrant County PSAPs indicates that at least half of those call centers are at 100% of their authorized staffing levels. The average staffing level exceeds 92%. Tarrant County PSAPs rarely fall below a staffing level of 85%.

There is no doubt training can be expensive. Therefore, Tarrant County 9-1-1 District has focused on offsetting some of the cost and offers training within reach of every budget. It is important to remember that bypassing training is somewhat like failing to maintain safety equipment, squad cars or fire trucks. Without regular maintenance these important assets fall into disrepair and even become liability risks. The same is true of the dedicated calltakers and dispatchers who process 9-1-1 calls. They are valuable assets to 9-1-1 and training is essential to maintain performance, sharpen skills and enhance knowledge of current issues. We'd like to encourage PSAPs to take advantage of the testing and training opportunities available in Tarrant County this year. Calltakers, dispatchers, training officers, supervisors and administrators are encouraged to keep district staff in the loop when special needs arise so that new opportunities can be made available.

Above all, we encourage consideration of the testing, hiring, and training costs that didn't happen and the people who didn't seek employment elsewhere. Keeping the skills and abilities of talented 9-1-1 professionals engaged in Tarrant County PSAPs is its own kind of return on investment. We hope to see these dividends repeated over and over in the months to come.