

911: DISPATCHER PROTOCOL

Dispatchers play a critical role in receiving, relaying and recording reports of domestic violence. Dispatchers should be aware of the of the potential dangers presented by domestic incidents and should be trained annually on the topic. Departments should assess the feasibility of implementing special prompter screens and record systems which can be immediately pulled up with an incoming call.

A telecommunicator who receives a report of a domestic violence incident should dispatch officers to respond to the scene in every incident. Domestic violence calls should be treated with the same priority as other life-threatening calls for service. Preferably two officers should be dispatched to the scene. Should the victim call back and cancel the request for assistance, the dispatcher should not cancel the response. Instead advise officers of the call-back but have them continue to the scene to determine if further investigation is warranted.

RESPONSE PROCEDURE

During the initial call for assistance, the dispatcher should attempt to find out as much information as possible about the incident, and the previous history of the parties involved. The operator should communicate this information to the responding officers. The following information, in order of importance, should be gathered as time and circumstances allow:

The nature of the incident?

The address? Apartment number? Left or right side?
Business name?

Has anyone been injured? Is an ambulance needed?

Are weapons involved? If yes, what kind?

A telephone number for the caller?

Is the suspect present? Suspect's name? Describe the suspect and, if not present, his/her whereabouts.

Is the suspect under the influence of drugs or alcohol? If yes, what substance?

Are children present?

Does the victim have an ex parte or protective order against the suspect?

Is the caller the victim or a witness?

Has the victim been sexually assaulted?

The telecommunicator should not ask the victim if she is willing to "press charges," or "prosecute" the case. Any comment which places the responsibility for enforcement action with the victim is inappropriate.

VICTIM SAFETY

The safety of the domestic violence victim, whether the threat is immediate or remote, should be the ultimate concern of the operator. If the caller is the victim, the dispatcher should keep her on the line as long as possible and tell her that the officers are on their way and when they should arrive. The operator should advise the victim to ensure her safety by remaining on the 911 line until officers arrive, waiting at a neighbor's house, or convenience store, or simply leaving the residence if the batterer returns.

If the operator notes an abrupt change in the caller's responses, it may indicate that the offender has returned to the victim's location. The operator may be able to obtain more information by asking the caller to respond with simple yes and no questions, or in code. For example, "If the suspect has come back in the room, say a number between one and five; or, on a scale from one to five, with five being the worst, how threatened do you feel?"

If the caller is a witness to a domestic incident in progress, the dispatcher should keep the caller on the line and relay ongoing information to the responding officers.

If the dispatcher has immediate access to police records, they should review those records to identify the number of previous domestic violence related calls logged to that address, the existence of a protection order, outstanding warrants, and whether the suspect is out on bond or on probation. That information should be radioed to the responding officers.

Telecommunicators should periodically check the safety of the responding officers at the scene as they would on any other potentially life-threatening call.

All 911 tapes should be maintained and catalogued because the recordings may be vital evidence in a criminal case. Agencies should devise a systematic method for officers or detectives to review the 911 tape when a criminal case is pending.