



## **COVID-19 GUIDELINES FOR EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTERS**

State and local public health agencies are closely monitoring the spread of the COVID-19 virus. On January 31, 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency to address the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19), and on March 11, 2020, Governor Doug Ducey issued a declaration of Public Health Emergency due to the necessity to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Emergency Communications Centers (ECC) have a duty to protect and serve the public, and Emergency Communications Center Managers must take steps to protect the Telecommunicators working at their centers. Therefore, the Arizona Chapter of APCO/NENA has designed this document as a guide to assist managers in the preparation and execution of steps to mitigate exposure and respond to potential reduced staffing due to a spread of the virus.

### **Preventative measures:**

- Set up alert system for easy notification of ECC personnel
- Set hand sanitizer bottles at entrances and throughout the room
- Establish mandatory wipe downs of all work stations, common areas, door handles, refrigerators, coffee makers, elevator buttons, etc. with bleach, Lysol wipes, or other disinfectant
- Reduce or restrict access to the Communications center including sit-alongs, tours, and non-essential personnel
- Keep a supply of N-95 masks if possible
- Advise dispatchers of additional questions that indicate a caller may be suffering from COVID-19, such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing and advise responding police, fire, and EMS
- Discuss policy related to exposed employees, employees showing symptoms, employees that may not have medical time available
- Discuss options with neighboring agencies. Gather portable radios, determine process for transferring 9-1-1 lines, text to 9-1-1 to another agency in case of consolidation of personnel.
- Discuss options for employees if schools close i.e.: utilizing Parks and Recs for childcare (would also assist police and firefighters), work from home
- Determine equipment needs for potential stay at home options

### **Measures for 20-25% reduction in staff:**

- Continue preventative measures
- Close ancillary talk groups (INFO, talk-arounds, etc.)
- Run emergency traffic from main channels

- Suspend training. Utilize trainees where possible to the level of their training (accepting non-emergency calls, phones only) and consider sending untrained employees home with study materials.
- Discuss potential for keeping employees in Communications around the clock. Determine supplies such as cots or inflatable mattresses.
- Notify county 9-1-1 liaison and neighboring agencies of staffing decrease. (Assume that the trend will continue before decreasing)

**Measures for 30%+ reduction in staff:**

- Continue preventative measures.
- Patch talk groups
- Prepare for alternatives to answering administrative (non-emergency) lines. Utilize personnel from outside Communications, consider work from home options.
- Notify Public Information Officer

**Measures for 40%+ reduction in staff:**

- Cancel vacations
- Implement 12-hour shifts
- Communicate daily with employees
- Prepare for school closures
- Keep non-essential staff at home
- Prepare to consolidate with neighboring agency to share resources
- Request volunteers to quarantine in place in Communications
- Close non-emergency lines overnight. Utilize online reporting for citizen complaints that do not require response.

**Measures for 50%+ reduction in staff:**

- Consolidation with neighboring agency. Transfer 9-1-1 calls to the agency and share call takers for 2-3 agencies. Dispatch with portable radios or laptop radios. Utilize laptops for CAD or move to paper-based system. Dispatch using plain English.
- Implement message on non-emergency lines with alternatives such as delaying reports until the next business day, utilizing online reporting systems, utilizing at home personnel to assist with administrative type calls.

These are only to be construed as guidelines to assist you and your department in considering options while planning for a potential staffing crisis due to this pandemic. Please consult with your policy makers before implementing change in your Communications Center.

Thank you,

**AZ APCO/NENA Executive Board**

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