



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAYETTE COUNTY 911 OPERATORS HONORED FOR DEDICATED SERVICE

Uniontown, PA – Fayette County Emergency Management Agency’s many telecommunications officers (TCOs) are ready for anything.

The last few months saw 911 operators fielding thousands of calls covering a wide variety of emergencies – from car accidents to fires, medical emergencies to inclement weather-related disasters. The latter was especially stressful on March 3, when heavy wind gusts led to widespread power outages across Fayette County.

An outage in the City of Uniontown caused a power disruption in the Fayette County 911 Center, located along West Main Street, which immediately operated fully on uninterrupted backup generator power. Beginning at 3 p.m. that day, 911 TCOs received and processed 891 calls over an eight-hour period, dispatching first responders to countless emergencies.

Fayette County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) Director Roy Shipley said key EMA administrators and employees remained on site and dedicated to ensuring the call center was fully staffed throughout the weather event.

Their swift organization and calm demeanors throughout the weather event were the result of extensive professional training, according to EMA Office Manager/Open Records Officer/911 Records Representative Sue Griffith.

“Trainees are taught various telephone, radio and mapping computer systems and become proficient from the first ring until all units leave the scene and the call is cleared,” Griffith said. “Agency-wide continuing education is encouraged, accommodated and, in the care of our TCOs, mandated.”

New Fayette County TCOs undergo 272 classroom training hours, followed by 240-320 practical hours in the 911 center, with a mentor’s guidance, Griffith said. That training includes certifications in:

- Basic First Aid;
- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR);
- Introduction to the Incident Command System;
- Introduction to the National Incident Management System;
- Hazardous Materials Awareness;
- Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Basic Public Safety Telecommunication Courses;
- Pennsylvania Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network (CLEAN);
- National Crime Information Center (NCIC) System;
- Emergency Medical Dispatch Protocols;

- Fire Service Dispatch Protocols;
- Law Enforcement Dispatch Protocols;
- And much more.

Other training is designed for Fayette County TCOs, such as jurisdiction-specific geography training, departmental directives and local governance structure.

“Within seconds of the call to 911 that an event is unfolding, we have the capability to locate the caller more specifically than we ever have. Life-saving information perfected by local medical professionals can be provided from childbirth to CPR, and these instructions work. We’ve seen it time and time again. Our TCOs monitor the scene, the situation and the first responders from marking enroute to clearing the scene,” Griffith said. “Unfortunately, some of our fire departments, police departments and EMS providers don’t have 24-hour staffing, so without someone to take the call and activate the responders, the situation would become far worse. Our TCOs are the key link in the chain of events in any emergency.”

The Fayette County Commissioners recently recognized 911 operators’ outstanding efforts during a monthly board meeting, presenting them with a certificate for National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

Griffith said “TCO Week” is a chance to “acknowledge, recognize and celebrate the men and women of Fayette County 911.” She said the best way for citizens to support emergency personnel is to “listen to the TCOs.”

“The questions they ask are not random. They are specific to the crisis and key to getting the proper response and best outcome, so answer the questions and don’t hang up until you are told it is OK to do so. Something may happen to change the situation, which may change the response, and the TCO needs to know this because our responders need to know this,” Griffith said. “People ask if the TCOs ever think about a call after it’s over – of course they do. They may feel angry, concerned, incredibly sad – but they regroup quickly because they don’t know what the next call will bring. One thing is certain – the next call will receive the same care, concern, skill and response warranted.”

The Fayette County Emergency Management Agency/911 is located at 24 East Main St. in Uniontown. To learn more, visit www.fayettecountypa.org/238/Emergency-Management-Agency-911.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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