

A Day in the Life of a 911 Telecommunicator

The purpose of this document is to describe in some detail what a person can expect on a “normal” day on the job as a 911 Telecommunicator. The following description is what a telecommunicator might experience on a regular basis.

Because the Grand Junction Regional Communication Center supports 21 Law, Fire and EMS agencies in Mesa County, you will receive emergent and non-emergent telephone calls; you will then dispatch the appropriate Law, Fire or EMS response; monitor progress of en route units and provide support to responding units until completion of the call; enter calls into the Computer Aided Dispatch system via a keyboard device; and retrieve information from the national and state crime computers.

People who call 911 are not usually happy people. They may be injured, angry, frightened, panicked, enraged, and/or confused. They call because they have a problem and 911 is their first contact. Your voice will be the assuring, calming voice they will hear in their hour of need. You will be the one to get information from them that is needed to get help to them as quickly as possible. You'll use all your training toward this goal, utilizing a wide set of skills that is unique to this profession (Dispatchers receive 9-12 months of extensive training. During the training period, your schedule will change approximately every three to four weeks.)

After training is complete, you will be assigned to a vacant shift. There are six basic shifts that comprise a hybrid 5/8 – 4/10 work schedule:

Day Shift:	7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (8 hrs.) or 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (10 hrs.)
Swing Shift:	3:00 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. (8 hrs.) or 3:00 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. (10 hrs.)
Power Shift:	5:00 p.m. to 3:30 a.m. (10 hrs.)
Grave Yards:	9:00 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. (10 hrs.)

Each fall the entire staff bids for their shifts for the coming year based upon seniority. This means that after the training period, the newest dispatchers will likely be working the last shifts available, usually swing shift or grave yard shift and will probably work most weekends and holidays (you will be required to work weekends, holidays, day, swing and/or late shifts with hours and days subject to change).

The job requires you to remain at a fixed work station for extended periods of time with a fluctuating work load – from heavy volume of calls to minimal demands within a short period of time occurring continuously. You will be working in an enclosed environment with multi-dispatch stations requiring close communication with co-workers and limited privacy. All telephone and radio conversations are recorded.

Obviously, a telecommunicator works under extremely stressful conditions at times but also must remain awake and alert throughout an 8 – 10 hr. shift when much of that shift might be very quiet and uneventful (many calls you receive can be as strange and of a non-

emergency nature, such as “How do I cook a turkey?”). The position requires the ability to interpret maps and drawings; use independent judgment and make good, quick decisions; and perform multiple tasks in a high stress environment. While the 911 team enjoys humor and camaraderie, they take their work seriously. They take pride in helping the citizen callers through some of the most frightening, stressful experiences of their lives. Confidentiality is required and many aspects of your work cannot be discussed with anyone. You may never know the outcome of many incidents. All callers must be treated with courtesy and professionalism and given your full attention. This code of behavior is also the standard by which the 911 team treats one another.

When a critical incident occurs, an awesome thing happens. Everyone in the Center—dispatchers, supervisors, agents—all quietly and quickly work together until the situation is resolved. It is like choreography, or a hive where all the bees work in concert. The teamwork is phenomenal, and essential to making the Grand Junction Communications Center the professional organization that it is.

You will be joining a very select group of highly skilled “multi-taskers.” Although the support of your family for your career is essential, no one will understand the types of calls you are fielding more than another 911 telecommunicator does. You can expect to receive support and encouragement from all your trainers and co-workers. Everyone tries to help one another whenever and however needed. After all, we are people who enjoy helping people!