

# TACTICAL DISPATCH CLASS

## CHANGING THE ORDER OF CHAOS

**/Kelly Foreman,**  
Public Information Officer

In high-risk situations requiring tactical law enforcement response, chaos often is an inevitable element both on scene and in 911 call centers.

However, a class being taught at the Department of Criminal Justice Training is helping telecommunicators learn how to eliminate some of that chaos.

Tactical dispatching is not a new concept, but it is one that has not been implemented across much of the eastern United States, said Elyse Christian, DOCJT advanced telecommunications instructor. In Kentucky, only one team — Louisville MetroSafe, in conjunction with Louisville Metro police, fire and EMS — has been exercising the concept for some time.

"It was just something I had never thought of," Christian said about tactical dispatching. "It makes perfect sense that a telecommunicator would go with the team. It's a great help to the actual responders who are there and it also helps the communication center."

The purpose of tactical dispatching is to take the confusion out of situations in which law enforcement, fire and/or EMS have been called to an emergency scene by allowing an on-scene dispatcher or dispatchers to take control of the flow of information.

Students learn how to document incoming and outgoing information at the scene, such

as descriptions of suspects, criminal histories, floor plans of involved buildings, suspect demands and more.

"In many cases, if there is not someone going who is actually doing all the documentation," Christian said. "You have police officers writing very cryptic notes and you think, 'What does that say?'"

A tactical dispatcher, however, keeps track of every detail for everyone on scene. They also can be responsible for answering phone calls from chiefs, mayors and citizens as well as quickly filling in responders who come on scene after the rest of the team has been briefed about the incident.

"Any agency can do it," Christian continued. "It doesn't cost a lot of money. You need a ruler, some flip chart paper, a couple of markers and some pencils. The cool thing is, [the information logs] are hanging on the car, and when we are done, your last thing on there is the time that everybody has cleared the scene. You roll it up, put a rubber band around it and you have it ready for court. So, the documentation is a tremendous benefit for liability's sake."

"In a regular communication center, you have a phone in each ear and you are doing your EMS calls and your fire calls and this situation is still going on — it is very hard for somebody to keep track of every little

detail," Christian said. "This just makes it much easier."

Ed Cox, who serves as the coordinator for Louisville MetroSafe's communications response team, said since the team began a few years ago, they have responded to everything from train derailments, plane crashes and major fires to HAZMAT call outs, overturned tankers and high-risk search warrants. The team operates with three highly-trained dispatchers and hopes to expand to include more members in the near future.

Cox considers the team close-range support for the agencies with which it works.

"If an incident commander is on [the scene of] a huge house fire, instead of getting on the radio and calling someone saying, 'I need this,' I'm standing right there close by and they can look at me and say, 'I need a city bus for rehab, I need medical units, I need EPA,'" Cox said. "They don't have to explain to me what is going on or give me a background story like they would have to give a dispatcher because I am already in close support."

"It also relieves some of the responsibility and duties off the communications center," Cox continued. "They can go on about their business because we do all the on-scene

logging like an event record and take care of all the forms and logs. We become the logistics chief on a small scale."

In the class, students spend time familiarizing themselves with video and audio of real-life emergency scenarios. They then learn how to begin documenting information from those scenarios as Cox described. On the second day, the students take what they have learned in the classroom and apply it in scenario-based training with local emergency response teams.

Training telecommunicators across the state in this type of on-scene, emergency dispatching ensures that when situations arise where they are needed, the operation can run more smoothly, be more organized and ultimately lead to a safer and faster conclusion, Christian said.

"The faster you can have a resolution or the faster you can even just contain it, the safer it is for everybody," she said. "The biggest difference in having this person on the team, doing all the documentation, keeping all the records and doing all the radio traffic — that frees up at least one responder, sometimes more, to go do his or her job. It puts a civilian in there so that officers can go out and do what they need to do." ■

▼ RICHMOND POLICE MAJ. BOB MOTT (LEFT, FAR RIGHT), AND RPD SGT. ROY JOHNSON (CENTER) TALK TO MEMBERS OF THE DOCJT TACTICAL DISPATCH CLASS DURING TRAINING WITH THE AGENCY. TACTICAL DISPATCHERS RELIEVE TACTICAL TEAM OFFICERS FROM KEEPING TRACK OF DETAILS AND COMMUNICATIONS DURING HIGH-RISK SITUATIONS.

/PHOTOS BY KELLY FOREMAN

