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## Emergency Center Express

### **In The News – July 2007**

#### **911 Dispatchers Complain About Low Pay, High Turnover**

Posted By: Brynn Galindo KGET 17 News Online 06/12/2007

BAKERSFIELD - They are the lifeline between you and first responders in emergency situations, and now 911 dispatchers in Kern County said they're facing an emergency of their own.

Low pay and high turnover continue to plague the county's main dispatch center in Bakersfield, and stress levels are soaring.

17 News reported on this issue six years ago when dispatchers were asking for a pay hike and more personnel.

They got a pay hike back then, but the county has never filled all the vacancies at the dispatch center. That is taking its toll on the dedicated people who answer your 911 calls. Sheriff's dispatcher Sylvia Pinon said she is unsettled by not knowing if her co-workers can respond to an emergency call quickly enough to save a life.

"If I have an emergency, they might not answer the phone for a little bit," said Pinon. "We don't have enough people to help us do that."

Pinon has been a dispatcher for almost nine years, and said the overtime required to fill in for the current vacancies is severely affecting her family.

"I'm a single mom with four children, and I put in 40 hours ... 30 hours overtime this last pay period, so that takes away time with them," she said.

She said if a better offer comes her way, she might have to consider leaving the Sheriff's Department.

"If the money is better somewhere else and the hours are better, and the workload is less, I'm going to go there," Pinon said.

Mike Derryberry is a senior dispatcher, but is also forced to undertake basic duties in addition to answering 911 calls because there are not enough fully trained dispatchers.



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"Overall, we're surviving, but morale is not where it should be," Derryberry said. "It's kind of that help-each-other mentality. We know we're short, but after a 12-hour shift, you're totally exhausted."

Derryberry said better pay and benefits will attract qualified candidates who then won't be lost to the California Highway Patrol or other agencies with better paying jobs.

"New hires call the day they're supposed to start, saying they'll go to work for Red Lobster to make more money," he said. "That doesn't say a lot about us."

County Supervisor Don Maben said negotiations will soon begin with dispatch union representatives.

"We're going to be re-entering negotiations at the start of next week, and the dispatcher issue and other inequities will be discussed at that time," Maben said.

All applicants for the high-stress dispatch jobs must first take a rigorous written test and pass a background test.

That's nothing, they said, compared to the pressures of working in a pressure-packed working environment where life and death issues are dealt with on a daily basis.

## **What Does This Mean For You?**

Staffing is an issue concerning PSAPs across the country. Grade of service can be compromised when a center isn't appropriately staffed. **Overtime costs** may be invading your budget to the extent pay increases can't be considered, affecting your ability to keep your trained dispatchers and attract qualified applicants.

**Precise scheduling** saves money, reduces overtime and can enhance center-wide morale.

## **Bell Services West Will Help**

Our [E9-1-1 Performance Benchmark Service](#) provides measurability and identifies trends to assist you in scheduling, staffing and growth of your center. By analyzing your center's status data, we will provide you with reports that will allow you to accurately and effectively schedule your center.

For only \$500, our [E9-1-1 Performance Benchmark Service](#) gives you unbiased proof of your center's staffing requirements. These are reports you can use to obtain grants or request additional staff budget.