

Ohio Becomes the 24th State to Establish Telecommunicator Training Standards

by William H. Hinkle

It took five years and a lot of persistence, but on November 5, 1997, the Governor of the State of Ohio signed a Bill (S.B. 5) that for the first time establishes a minimum telecommunicator training standard for Ohio's Public Safety Communications personnel. In signing the Bill, the State of Ohio recognized that Public Safety Communications is a profession that requires specialized training. While not mandatory, the Bill is based on a nationally recognized standard¹ that establishes a definable minimum training curriculum for all public safety communications personnel.

Five years ago, in what was a unique display of mutual cooperation, an Ohio State Task Force was formed. The Task Force, which was spearheaded by the Ohio Chapters of NENA and APCO, consisted of representatives from all areas of Ohio's public safety sector. The members included representatives from law enforcement, fire, EMS, and communications associations from across Ohio. The mission of the Task Force was based on the proposition that the State of Ohio should establish a basic Telecommunicator Training program, thus assuring the citizens of Ohio that their calls for emergency services are being processed by trained professionals.

The legislation establishes a 40-hour basic training program and an 8 hour recertification program every two years. The basic 40 hour course curriculum will include, but not be limited to, instruction in the following areas:

- The Role of the Emergency Service Telecommunicator
- Effective Communications Skills
- Emergency Service Telecommunicator Liability
- Telephone Techniques
- Radio Broadcast Techniques
- Requirements of the Americans with Disability Act (as amended that pertain to Emergency Service Telecommunicators)
- Handling Hysterical and Suicidal Callers
- Law Enforcement Technology
- Fire Service Technology
- Emergency Medical Service Technology
- Emergency Call Processing Guides for Law Enforcement
- Emergency Call Processing Guides for Fire Service
- Emergency Call Processing Guides for Emergency Medical Services
- Disaster Planning
- Police Officer Survival and/or Fire and EMS Scene Safety

The Ohio Department of Education, Division of Adult Vocational and Career Education, will be responsible for funding and administering the statewide program. Training will be available at no charge to any public employee in the State of Ohio who has been hired to perform the duties of an Emergency Service Telecommunicator. This method of delivery offers some of the following advantages:

- Schools are conveniently located throughout the State of Ohio.
- Training is accessible as a career tract for individuals seeking employment in the public safety communications profession.
- Agencies concerned about the associated cost of training could simply require that the perspective employee obtain state certification before applying for employment.
- The Department of Education is a neutral body whose only focus would be to meet educational needs and standards.

The bill is permissive in that it still permits an agency to provide training and certification in-house as long as it meets the state standard. And while the Bill isn't everything that the Task Force hoped that it would be, passage of the Bill will help to insure that Ohio's Emergency Service Telecommunicators will be provided with basic competencies and a well-rounded foundation for the supplemental training that is unique to each individual agency.

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