



IAFC GUIDANCE ON PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS AND 9-1-1 CENTERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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During the coronavirus pandemic, it is critical that departments evaluate their communications posture and take steps to ensure the right resources, mitigation strategies, and tools are in place to manage uncertainties. Innovative thinking and rapid adaptation of procedures will enable departments to safeguard themselves and their communications during the outbreak. Based on input from the IAFC's Communications Committee, the association recommends that departments SCREEN, PLAN, and REEVALUATE as they prep their communications for the demands of the public health emergency.

The IAFC recommends departments SCREEN:

- Ensure that the department is following NFPA guidelines for monitoring and maintaining communications systems.
- Check the cyber and physical security posture of voice communications and land mobile radio sites.
- Ensure that all state and federal radio capabilities are up to date.
- If a metropolitan department, make sure the department has enough parts available to repair radios.

Think of ways to PLAN:

- Ensure that the department has a plan to respond to outages of backhaul networks.
- If the department has a backup communications center available, prepare to utilize the center in the event it is needed.
- Test back up call centers for radio, computer and IT issues and ensure that all equipment is updated.
- Plan to utilize alternate voice communications technologies, such as LTE push-to-talk applications, if radio outages occur.
- Evaluate whether the department needs access to additional spectrum for backhaul, etc.

And REEVALUATE existing procedures:

- Survey whether radio technicians need medical screening, given their contact with department radios.
- Ensure radios are sanitized between shifts, according to manufacturer guidelines.
- Implement a daily system status check.
- Consider adding additional mutual aid radio resources outside of your normal mutual aid response radius.
- Conduct preventative maintenance on radio systems.
- Consider restricting PSAP facility access to employees only and evaluate the need to require these employees to self-monitor for symptoms.

Chiefs responsible for emergency communications centers may have additional items to consider. The IAFC recommends that these chiefs:

- Refresh or create a department's continuity of operations plan (COOP) for the PSAP, including planning for a reduced workforce.
- Institute measures that would situate 911 telecommunicators 6-10 feet apart.
- Based on the levels of community spread, evaluate whether call takers and dispatchers should be wearing face masks and/or hand protection.
- Check that WiFi, hot-spots, LAN switches, and security patches are current and functional.
- Initiate comprehensive sanitizing procedures for the call center.
- Ensure administrative personnel (e.g. trainers) are prepared to take calls if necessary.
- Investigate alternate technology applications that would enable remote call-taking.

For further information please refer to official CDC guidance for 911 call center operations during the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-for-ems.html>