

911 Dispatcher

Answer the worst call of someone's life, work out what they need, and send help while keeping them alive on the line.

TYPICAL PAY

\$53,040

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$37k to \$80k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

911 centers, police and fire departments, county and state a...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
A diploma or equivalent is the usual minimum. Typing speed, clear speech and a calm head matter more than grades.
- 2 Apply to a county or city 911 center** Weeks
Most agencies hire at 18. Some require 21 for certain roles.
- 3 Testing and background check** 1 to 4 months
A typing test, a multitasking and listening test, an interview panel, a thorough background investigation, a hearing test and, at some agencies, a polygraph.
- 4 Academy and certification** 3 to 8 weeks
A paid basic course covering call taking, radio procedure, law and stress. Certification as a dispatcher is typically required, and many states set a deadline for earning it after hire.
- 5 On-the-job training** 3 to 12 months
Months sitting beside a training officer, taking live calls with someone listening, before you are released to work solo.

Pros and cons

- + Hired and paid straight out of high school, with no tuition at all
- + A public pension and loan forgiveness
- + The work genuinely saves lives, most shifts
- You hear the worst moments of people's lives and cannot follow up
- Mandatory overtime and 12-hour night shifts are normal
- You sit for the whole shift, and the stress is constant

Optional boosts

Emergency medical dispatch. Fire and law enforcement dispatch protocols. Communications training officer. Supervisor and center management training.

Good to know

The first 911 call was made in Alabama

On February 16, 1968 a call was placed in Haleyville, Alabama to launch the new three-digit emergency number. Before that, every town had its own seven-digit police and fire numbers, and you had to know the...

The job is officially filed as office work

In the federal occupation system dispatchers sit in the office and administrative support family, alongside clerks and receptionists. Campaigners have spent years pushing states to reclassify them as f...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Public Safety Telecommunicators (43-5031.00)
APCO International, the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials
California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training
USAJOBS, the federal government's official hiring site

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/emergency-dispatcher>



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