

Eastern Shore of Virginia 9-1-1 Communications Center FAQs

WORK-RELATED

- ***What are the schedule requirements?***

Currently, most full-time employees work twelve-hour shifts with a four-hour shift option every other weekend. The twelve-hour shift times are 6AM-6PM and 6PM-6AM and four hour shifts every other Saturday that are generally 6AM-10AM or 6PM-10PM depending on the shift an individual is currently assigned to. Full-time employees generally work three shifts one week and four shifts another week, which generally provides every other weekend off. Full-time employees have the option of working three twelve-hour shifts Friday-Sunday, which generally allows the option for overtime pay, or the four-hour Saturday shift may be worked, forfeiting potential overtime.

Part-time employees work a combination of twelve, eight, six, and four-hour shifts depending on the availability submitted by the employee and the needed coverage for the 9-1-1 Center. It should be noted that the schedule can change based on the needs of the 9-1-1 Center. Part-time employees are required to submit at least four available shifts per month.

- ***What kind of schedule can I expect to work?***

9-1-1 Communications Officer trainees can work up to 40 hours a week while in training. The hours a trainee works will depend on their availability and their employment status outside of the 9-1-1 Center. All employees are required to be on time for each shift and tardiness is not tolerated.

- ***Will I ever work by myself?***

No. You will always work with a partner. Depending on the shift you work, you will always work with 1-3 other people.

- ***How are vacation requests handled (holidays, birthdays, etc.)?***

Vacations are granted based on staffing needs. Employees have the opportunity each month to submit a calendar to request days off. The manager responsible for handling the schedule will then attempt to cover those requests. All efforts to grant time off are made, but the requests are not guaranteed. During holiday weeks, the manager formulating the schedule will generally attempt to give full-time employees the holiday off by using available part-time employees. If a full-time employee is unable to be off on the actual holiday, an effort will be made to give that employee another day off during

that work week. If that option is not possible, the employee will accrue overtime pay/compensatory time for that week.

- ***What are some benefits of the schedule/job?***

- With the current schedule, full-time employees may get a three-day weekend (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) every other week and days off in the middle of the week.
- Working seven scheduled shifts in a fourteen-day period allows for more days off.
- Full-time employees are offered health, dental, and life insurance through Northampton County. These benefits are not currently available for part-time employees.
- Activity in the 9-1-1 Center provides variety in the work environment.
- Comradery among personnel in the 9-1-1 Center and the agencies we serve.
- We have the unique opportunity to serve the public and make a difference in lives, one phone call at a time.
- All employees have access to the EAP (Employee Assistance Program).

- ***What are some negative aspects of the schedule/job?***

- Employees are required to work days, nights, weekends, and holidays.
- As essential personnel, full-time employees may be called in for mandatory shift coverage with little notice.
- Activity in the 9-1-1 Center can be busy and intense with periods of inactivity in-between.
- Calls received at the 9-1-1 Center can range from non-emergency-type natures to tragic fatality-type natures. These uncertainties can cause high levels of stress for employees.

- ***What kind of command structure is established in the 9-1-1 Center?***

A 9-1-1 Director, 9-1-1 Supervisor(s), and 9-1-1 Senior Communications Officers comprise the management staff of the ESVA 9-1-1 Center. In addition, there are Communications Officers (COs), with some serving as Certified Training Officers (CTOs).

- ***What happens if I am sick or have a family emergency?***

You must notify the on-call manager as soon as possible so that coverage may be obtained.

- ***What can you do with downtime?***

Time between calls is used to work on assigned projects and review training material. Employees do have the privilege to have their personal cell phones but are not to be used during active emergency calls. Employees also have limited access to the internet and TV.

TRAINING

- ***How long is initial training?***

Classroom training for new hires takes approximately 4-5 weeks and dispatch floor training takes approximately 3-4 weeks, depending on the trainee. Full-time new hires will move more quickly through training than a part-time employee if the part-time employee has job responsibilities outside of the 9-1-1 Center and less availability. Key benchmarks must be met to continue through employment. Each new hire employee will be on a probationary period for at least six months.

- ***What can I expect from training?***

During the classroom portion of the training process, you will receive a general orientation and training from various agency-specific manuals. You will complete classes to become certified as a Telecommunicator, Emergency Medical Dispatcher, and Fire Communications Dispatcher. You must maintain a CPR certification every two years. During the dispatch floor training, you will be placed with a CTO who will assist you in putting your classroom training to use. This is the hands-on training where you will get to actually do the job of a Communications Officer. The CTO will complete and submit daily observation reports (DORs) about your progress.

- ***What kind of skills should I have?***

Good listening skills, area knowledge and map skills, strong keyboard and computer skills, customer service oriented, multi-tasking abilities, flexible schedule abilities to meet the needs of the 9-1-1 Center, dependability and promptness. You should be able to speak clearly and act quickly in emergencies, gather, organize, translate and process information from various emergency callers, draw reasonable and logical conclusions from information which may be disjointed, make decisions quickly and independently that may affect someone's life, follow established protocols, take direction, and take immediate action.

TELEPHONE CALLS

- ***How are telephone calls received and processed?***

Most telephone calls are received by people dialing 9-1-1 on landlines or cellular phones. Occasionally calls are received on administrative lines or via radio. The telephone call is then processed by a Communications Officer and entered into the CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) system. Some emergency calls may also be received via text messaging.

- ***What if the caller doesn't speak English?***

The 9-1-1 Center has access to interpreter services that assists with our translating needs.

- ***When multiple phone lines ring at once, what line do you answer first?***

Our telephone system will automatically give priority to the emergency 9-1-1 lines first and in the order of which they were dialed and will then answer administrative phone lines. It may be necessary for a call-taker to place a caller on hold to answer another emergency line and then determine which emergency has the highest priority for dispatch.

- ***What do you do with telephone calls that just need law enforcement response?***

The ESVA 9-1-1 Center receives all 9-1-1 calls, but only processes calls that involve Fire/EMS services. All law enforcement matters are transferred to the appropriate law enforcement agency with the press of one button.

- ***What types of telephone calls are received?***

You will answer many routine administrative calls. You will also answer emergency calls ranging from life and property threats to minor medical issues. You will have protocols to follow allowing you to handle all of these types of calls. Most emergency calls are time sensitive where immediate action is required.

AGENCIES

- ***How large of an area does the Eastern Shore of Virginia 9-1-1 Center cover?***

The ESVA 9-1-1 Center serves from the Maryland/Virginia state line down to the Chesapeake Bay bridge Tunnel, including everything in between the Atlantic Ocean and the Chesapeake Bay. This includes the islands of Chincoteague and Tangier.

- ***How many agencies does the Eastern Shore of Virginia 9-1-1 Center provide dispatching services to?***

The ESVA 9-1-1 Center serves two counties (Accomack and Northampton) and dispatches for twenty-one fire and EMS agencies, including the county emergency management departments working with the stations. Some stations are volunteer-based while others maintain 24-7 staffing with either DPS (Department of Public Safety) Fire/Medics or Emergency Medical Services personnel.