

Becoming a Public Safety/Emergency Dispatcher: Understanding the Position and Navigating the Hiring Process

Are you ready to commit to the job of a lifetime? Dispatching can be one of the most rewarding and exciting jobs available. Did you know that we have dispatchers in Teton County who have been working for us for 13, 15, even 21 years? In fact, the average length of tenure in the Communications Center is currently 7 years! Combine good wages, benefits, and excitement and you'll understand why.

Where do I sign up, you ask? First let us ask you a question. Do you know what dispatchers really do? Have you ever toured a dispatch center or sat with a dispatcher to observe their job functions? Unlike other clerically based positions, dispatching is a technically challenging career requiring patience, compassion, common sense, quick thinking and the ability to react well under pressure.

Successful dispatch candidates are often:

- “type A” personalities
- detail oriented
- capable multi-taskers
- excellent listeners
- able to prioritize
- able to work independently
- skilled in personal stress management

They can handle a workload that ranges from almost nothing to extremely demanding, and often changes in an instant. Most importantly, they are patient and compassionate people who care about others and want to make a difference.

The first question a candidate should ask and answer for themselves is why they want this position above others. Unlike other positions, dispatching requires a considerable commitment on the part of the employee:

- commitment to complete the intensive 3 month training program
- commitment to work the overnight shift, weekends and holidays
- commitment to endure sometimes hostile or intense calls and situations
- commitment to work up to 12-14 hour shifts without leaving your work station for more than a few minutes.

If you have not addressed your feelings on these matters it is imperative you do so before you apply for this position. We are very interested in those people who have taken the time to research and examine this position and have decided it is the right one for them.

The Teton County Sheriff's Office strongly encourages you to tour our dispatch center before applying for the position. We encourage you to see the area in which you would work, sit with a current dispatcher, observe their work, and ask questions of them. There is no better way to truly understand and evaluate the position itself. Please take the time to make an informed decision; it's been our experience that a large percentage of our attrition rate can be attributed to newly

hired employees who were not clear about what they were getting into when they took the position.

Do you think you have what it takes? Are you ready to make a difference in your community? Here are the steps involved in the hiring process for the position of Public Safety Dispatcher for Teton County.

THE HIRING PROCESS

1. *Apply.* The first step is completing and turning in the application. During the application period, applications can be picked up at the Teton County Sheriff's Office Administrative Offices, 180 S King Street, Jackson, WY 83001, or by visiting the Sheriff's Office web site at www.tetonsheriff.org.

2. *Typing Test.* All candidates must appear in person on the scheduled testing day and take a typing examination. Candidates must pass with a net score of at least 40 words per minute.

3. *Written Test.* The Teton County Sheriff's Office uses the I/O Solutions National Criminal Justice Officer Selection Inventory for all applicants, regardless of department. The test includes both a cognitive (i.e., problem-solving) and an attitude/behavioral-orientation (i.e., criminal justice officer orientation) component. This test normally takes between 1-1 ½ hours.

4. *Dispatcher Selection Test.* The Teton County Sheriff's Office uses The National Dispatcher Selection Test for all dispatch applicants. The test is designed to measure the basic skills necessary to perform successfully as a dispatcher. It measures general abilities that are normally developed over an extended period of time. It is not designed to measure job-specific knowledge or skills that are taught in training. The abilities measured are summarized below:

- *Reading Comprehension:* The ability to read passages and then retrieve facts, draw conclusions, and derive meaning.
- *Listening:* The ability to listen to and record orally imparted information, then retrieve facts, draw conclusions, and derive meaning from memory and notes.
- *Problem Solving:* The ability to draw logical conclusions from information presented. The ability to apply multi-tiered rules to a given situation in order to respond appropriately.
- *Prioritizing:* The ability to comprehend and extrapolate a given rule or set of rules in order to arrange actions in a certain order.
- *Multi-tasking:* The ability to quickly and accurately manage information presented, both orally and in written form. The ability to shift back and forth between two or more sources of information, without sacrificing attention to detail.

The entire test takes about 2 ½ hours and includes a short break.

5. *Oral Interview.* Successful applicants will be invited to an oral interview. Oral interviews are typically conducted by a 3-person panel consisting of the Communications Manager, and other representatives from the dispatch center, Sheriff's Office, Police Department, and/or other County departments.

6. *Determination of Ranking and Eligibility.* Applicants who have passed the above steps are ranked based on the compilation of scores achieved to this point. Depending on the number of vacancies, some applicants will be chosen to continue with the process. Those chosen are from the top of the ranked list, while the other applicants are placed on an eligibility list for future vacancies. The eligibility list remains valid for 1 year from the date of testing.

7. *Background investigation.* Applicants passing the above steps will undergo a thorough background investigation. The background investigation is based in part on the concept that past behavior is perhaps the best predictor of future performance. As a governmental public safety agency, the Sheriff's Office incurs liability if no attempt is made to investigate and evaluate a candidate's background. Applicants should be aware that the investigator likely will interview current and past employers as well as coworkers, roommates, neighbors, landlords and relatives during this process.

8. *Polygraph test.* The next step for applicants continuing with the process is the polygraph test. Polygraph tests are used to determine whether a candidate has been honest and has fully disclosed pertinent information over the course of the background investigation, or whether a candidate's responses are otherwise inconsistent with the high standards of integrity required of this position.

9. *Psychological evaluation.* Applicants will be evaluated by a Sheriff's Office appointed psychologist to determine mental fitness for performing dispatch functions. As part of the psychological evaluation, applicants will complete a standardized psychological test, such as the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory), along with a personal interview.

10. *Medical examination.* As the last step in the hiring process, applicants will be examined by a Sheriff's Office appointed physician to determine physical fitness for performing dispatch functions.

Each of the above steps is exclusionary in nature. That is, you must successfully complete each step in order to progress to the next one. This can seem like a daunting and time consuming process, however, it is far from impossible to achieve. Applicants should understand that this process is lengthy and will likely take anywhere from 6-8 weeks at a minimum to complete.

If you are interested in touring the center or asking any questions about the position and/or the hiring process itself, please contact the Communications Manager:

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We wish you the best of luck in your endeavor and look forward to working with you!