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Rex Barton
Municipal Technical Advisory Service, Rex.Barton@tennessee.edu

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Mandated Minimum Hiring And Training Standards
For Public Safety Dispatchers

by Rex Barton
MTAS Police Management Consultant

Beginning July 1, 1997, all public safety dispatchers who receive requests for emergency aid by telephone (call takers) or radio, or who dispatch emergency aid resources by radio or other telecommunications devices must have completed a course of study approved by the State of Tennessee Public Safety Committee.

In addition, all public safety dispatchers must meet minimum standards established by TCA 7-86-201. The standards are as follows:

- must be at least eighteen (18) years of age;
- be a citizen of the United States;
- be a high school graduate or possess equivalency;
- has no prior convictions, pleaded guilty or entered a plea of nolo contendere to any felony charge or violation of any federal or state laws, or city ordinances relating to force, violence, theft, dishonesty, gambling, liquor or controlled substances.
- has not been released or discharged under any other than honorable or medical discharge from any of the armed forces of the United States.
- fingerprints are on file with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation;
- completed a physical examination by a licensed physician;
- possess good moral character as determined by a thorough investigation conducted by the employing agency; and
- is free of all apparent mental disorders as described in the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association. They must be certified as meeting these criteria by a qualified professional in the psychiatric or psychological fields.
Dispatchers employed on July 1, 1997, must meet the minimum standards and must have completed the approved course of study. Dispatchers hired after July 1, 1997, must meet the minimum standards, and must complete the approved course of study within six months.

Approved Course Of Study

Agencies wishing to conduct the mandated training themselves must submit a Dispatcher Training Curriculum to the Public Safety Committee for approval. The Public Safety Committee has established criteria for the training curriculum, including a minimum of 24 hours classroom instruction time and 40 hours of in-service training with direct supervisor overview. Agencies may develop their own course material or submit a commercially supplied training course for approval.

Smaller agencies may decide to contract with another agency to provide the training. MTAS will maintain a list of public safety agencies that have received approval for their training curriculum and will make that list available to other cities.

MTAS recommends that smaller and medium size public safety agencies in the same geographic area approach this training as a cooperative effort. The cost of training and minimum standards supports consideration for consolidated communication systems, especially among the smaller and medium public safety agencies.

Cities should ensure that training curriculums are being prepared or arrangements are being made to obtain the training from other agencies. This new legislation does not include any type of grandfather provision and therefore, applies to everyone. All dispatchers must meet the new minimum standards by July 1, 1997.

Dispatcher Training Curriculum criteria can be obtained from:

State of Tennessee Public Safety Committee
3041 Sidco Drive, P.O. Box 41502
Nashville, Tennessee, 37204-1502
(615) 741-2664

For more information contact Rex Barton, MTAS Police Management Consultant at (423) 974-0411. Or, contact the MTAS office in your area.
The University of Tennessee
Municipal Technical Advisory Service

600 Henley Street, Suite 120
Knoxville, TN 37996-4105
(423) 974-0411
Fax (423) 974-0423

226 Capitol Boulevard, Suite 402
Nashville, TN 37219-1804
(615) 532-MTAS (6827)
Fax (615) 532-4963

605 Airways Boulevard, Suite 109
Jackson, TN 38301
(901) 423-3710
Fax (901) 425-4771

P.O. Box 100
Martin, TN 38238
(901) 587-7055
Fax (901) 587-7059

208 Sunset Drive, Suite 408
Johnson City, TN 37604
(423) 854-9882
Fax (423) 854-9223
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The Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) was created in 1949 by the state legislature to enhance the quality of government in Tennessee municipalities. An agency of the University of Tennessee’s Institute for Public Service, MTAS works in cooperation with the Tennessee Municipal League and affiliated organizations to assist municipal officials.

By sharing information, responding to client requests, and anticipating the ever-changing municipal government environment, MTAS promotes better local government and helps cities develop and sustain effective management and leadership.

MTAS offers assistance in areas such as accounting and finance, administration and personnel, fire, public works, law, ordinance codification, communications, and wastewater management. MTAS houses a comprehensive library and publishes numerous documents annually.

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