The City *of*
SAN DIEGO
Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer

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Average 911 Wait Times Exceed National Standards Following Operational Changes Under Mayor Faulconer
AVERAGE EMERGENCY WAIT TIME UNDER 10 SECONDS FOR 93 PERCENT OF CALLS IN NOVEMBER AFTER CITY TOOK SEVERAL STEPS TO ADDRESS LONG–STANDING DISPATCH ISSUES

San Diego – Following implementation of operational changes and a new compensation package for 911 police dispatchers to address long-standing recruitment and retention issues, Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer announced today that the average wait time for emergency calls now exceed the national benchmark of 90 percent of 911 calls answered within 10 seconds.

"This is a major milestone for our city as we have made significant progress thanks to the changes we've made to improve emergency wait times and provide better service to our neighborhoods," Mayor Faulconer said. "This is a positive step forward, but we know that we must maintain this standard to ensure that San Diego remains one of the nation's safest big cities."

In November, 93.11 percent of calls were answered in 0 to 10 seconds. When the San Diego Police Department began releasing monthly reports online in April, 67.41 percent of calls were answered in 10 seconds or less.

Month	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November
Total 911 Calls	48,723	49,385	51,312	57,846	55,122	53,413	50,255	44,607

Avg. Wait Time in Seconds	15.38	9.95	8.92	7.03	6.2	4.99	4.97	3.18
Calls Answered Within 10 Seconds	67.41%	76.20%	77.43%	81.90%	85.34%	88.43%	88.44%	93.11%

% of Calls Answered Within 10 Seconds
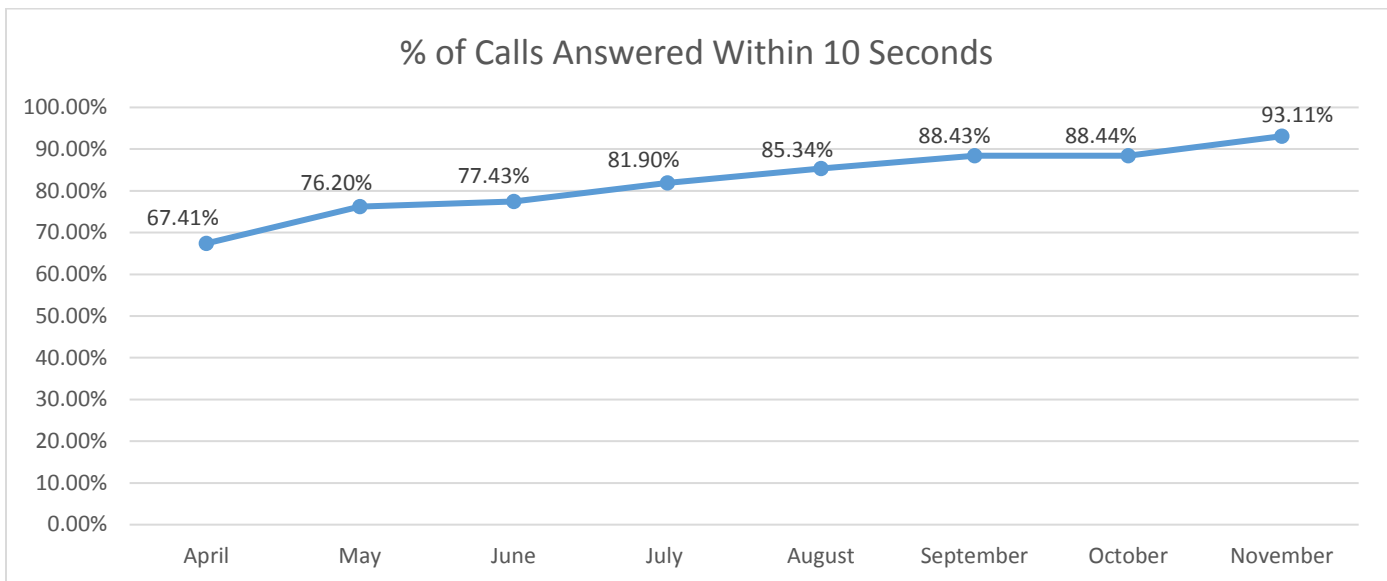
"We are proud of the progress we have made in our Dispatch Center as we know every second counts in an emergency," said Police Chief Shelley Zimmerman. "This improvement would not be possible without the hard work and commitment of our dispatchers who come to work each day ready to make a positive difference."

To address persistent dispatch issues, Mayor Faulconer won approval from the City Council for a new compensation package for 911 police dispatchers to address recruitment and retention issues.

Under the new agreement, police dispatchers receive three separate 5 percent increases staggered over 12 months to improve retention. The first increase went into effect July 1 and subsequent increases will begin Jan. 1 and July 1 of 2017. This follows several steps to make police dispatcher pay more competitive and improve operations at the dispatch center.

Before this new agreement and other compensation changes, San Diego ranked near the bottom in total compensation for police dispatchers – 17th out of 18th according to a California Agencies Survey conducted in November 2015. San Diego is expected to rank higher in future surveys following this round of compensation increases.

Mayor Faulconer had also taken several steps to address police dispatcher compensation and improve operations, including:

- Gaining approval from the Civil Service Commission to start police dispatchers at a higher base pay – an increase of 10.15 percent at the time

- Providing $1,000 exceptional merit bonuses for most police dispatchers in March

- Starting with Mayor Faulconer's first budget proposal in 2014, fully funding police dispatch positions (currently 134) for the first time in years so the funds are available to hire those positions

- Recruiting year-round for police dispatchers, which the City wasn't doing before

- Shifting additional resources to expedite the hiring process for police dispatchers

- Training 100 sworn officers and light-duty officers to assist at the call center when necessary (90 are already trained and able to assist)

- Implementing protocols that expedite call transfers to other agencies, such as Fire-Rescue

- Enhancing working conditions that allowed dispatchers to better monitor call waiting status and improve computer screen visibility

- Deploying technology and standardized recordings to better route non-emergency calls and provide answers to frequently asked questions, thus freeing up dispatchers to answer 911 calls

- Piloting a new shift schedule to provide better call coverage at the busiest times

- Releasing a public service announcement video to remind San Diegans to only dial 911 in life-threatening emergencies, not to hang up when calling 911 and to lock cell phone screens to reduce pocket dials

"The team effort that led to these types of improvements is exactly what Mayor Faulconer has in mind when he talks about his vision of a City government as innovative as the people we serve," said Performance & Analytics Department Director Almis Udrys. "Our operational excellence team jumped at the opportunity to engage with the fantastic group of dispatchers and facilitate identification and implementation of as many of their ideas as possible. We look forward to continuing to equip our colleagues throughout the City with the tools to effectively serve and support our communities."

BACKGROUND

In response to the City's financial crisis, funding was cut for public safety over the course of many years as City leaders worked to balance a shrinking budget.

Between Fiscal Year 2008 and Fiscal Year 2012, public safety – including emergency dispatch – saw reductions in the face of rising pension bills and an economic recession. Budgeted and actual positions decreased almost every year over that period.

At the same time, annual 911 call volume began to increase dramatically. There were more than 100,000 more calls to 911 in Fiscal Year 2015 compared to Fiscal Year 2008 (626,694 vs. 526,391).

A contributing factor is additional phone lines. Until 2014, callers to 911 would receive a busy signal if all lines were full. To avoid this, 16 lines were added over the last two years (10 in June 2014 and 6 in November 2015). The additional lines decreased busy signals but allowed for an increase in call capacity.

As a result, call wait times pre-2014 are not directly comparable to today because the dispatch system does not track callers who receive busy signals.

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