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NORTH TONAWANDA PBA SEEKS ITS OWN DISPATCH

High winds revealed Niagara County's 9-1-1 system is inefficient and unprepared for high call volumes

The North Tonawanda Police Benevolent Association (NTPBA) is renewing its call for its own dispatch system for emergency-response requests received by Niagara County 9-1-1 operators.

This appeal comes one day after strong winds resulted in high call volumes, revealing that the current Niagara County dispatch is too easily overwhelmed. It's putting residents and first-responders at risk.

"It is too soon to know the details regarding response times and how they were affected by Wednesday's wind storm," said NTPBA President Daryl Truty. "But cluttered airways and delayed response was the story of the day here in North Tonawanda."

In recent years, call volume in Niagara County has topped 300,000, resulting in crowded airways and dropped calls. The current dispatch situation is putting the community and city police officers at risk because of dramatically increased response times, according to NTPBA members.

"We have experienced significant problems with the 9-1-1 process since North Tonawanda Police calls were transferred to Niagara County in 2012," Truty said. "Most significantly, response times have increased, call details are muddled and calls are dropped."

From June 2011 to June 2012, when North Tonawanda police triaged and dispatched their own 9-1-1 calls, 85.6 percent of calls were dispatched within one minute. From June 2013 to June 2014, when Niagara County absorbed the dispatching duties, only 39.9 percent of calls to police were dispatched within a minute.

Similarly, from June 2011 to June 2012, when North Tonawanda police dispatched their own 9-1-1 calls, officers arrived on the scene of a call in less than three minutes 56.4 percent of the time. From June 2013 to June 2014, under Niagara County dispatch operations, officers arrived on scene in less than three minutes only 35.6 percent of the time.

“The consequences of a delayed dispatch cannot be overstated. Getting to the scene quickly is critical to every emergency response,” Truty said. “The county data indicates that response times are being dramatically affected. There is not one community in Niagara County that would find it acceptable to know that dispatch times have been negatively affected by more than 50 percent, resulting in officers taking longer to arrive on scene. The county must take steps to ensure that public safety is not compromised.”

Further, NTPBA members continue to assert that there is far too much radio traffic on the Niagara County 9-1-1 dispatch system, which comprises more than 30 police, fire and emergency response agencies. Often officers’ calls for assistance from the field do not transmit back to dispatch or to fellow officers. Additionally, the heavy “air traffic” forces officers to switch between two channels during a particular call, which distracts the officer while reacting to real-time events at a scene.

“One of us may be communicating on one channel but other officers or dispatchers may not hear us because they are on the other channel,” Truty said. “That’s a very real problem.”

Truty added that the switch from an analog to a digital radio system has also created problems, resulting in dropped calls or no service at all inside buildings. He referenced a 2016 [WKBW report](#) highlighting an incident in the Town of Niagara where police lost their radio signal inside a mall while making an arrest.

“That was just one incident; but it happens all the time, and not just when weather stresses the system. I cannot speak for the impact on other police departments in the county, but from our perspective, the North Tonawanda Police Department, should have its own dispatch channel.” Truty said.

*The North Tonawanda Police Benevolent Association represents the interests and well-being of the women and men serving as members of the North Tonawanda Police Department. Daryl Truty is an Erie County native, a resident of North Tonawanda and a 14-year veteran of law enforcement. **Follow NTPBA on Twitter @NT_PBA.***