

Goal: Improve crisis response

Manager wants faster, less costly service

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The Cincinnati Emergency Communications Section handled roughly 1.6 million calls this year and last, sending ambulances to the injured and sick, firetrucks to burning buildings and squad cars to crime victims.

That call volume is down from earlier in the decade, dropping about 13 percent since 2003, according to statistics provided by the city office.

But the city's new emergency communications manager hopes to see other drops — response time and costs.

"I'll be the first to admit that we weren't where we needed to be, but we're moving toward that," said Joel Estes, who began working for the city in June after retiring from the Bristol Police Department in Connecticut, where he spent 21 years on the force, the last seven leading the dispatch center. Bristol is roughly one-fifth the size of Cincin-

nati.

City Manager Milton Dohoney envisioned transforming the communication section, which works out of the Regional Operations Center perched atop Radcliff Drive in South Fairmount, last year.

"When I went over and observed the operation, we had fire and police dispatch happening in the same room, but acting as totally separate organizations with separate hierar-



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Joel Estes, Cincinnati's new emergency communications manager, hopes to see drops in response time and costs.

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chies," Dohoney said. "I believe by combining the two units we could save some money."

Estes, who was hired for \$96,638 a year, will oversee the cross-training of dispatchers over the next two years so they can handle any and all dispatch duties.

He believes that step will also quicken 911 services for those who call.

Before Estes was hired to run the office of roughly 130 employees, there were two full-time communications managers – Fire District Chief Ed Dardosky and Police Capt. Richard Schmaltz, according to the City Manager's Office.

The city replaced them with Estes and in 2011 will assign part-time liaisons from both departments.

Since Estes' arrival, the dispatch team has shaved 3.5 seconds – from 18 seconds to 14.5 seconds – off the average time it takes callers to get through to 911. The national average is 10 seconds, Estes said.

"Joel brings a lot of experience," Dohoney said. "To me, he was the complete package."

For now there is no plan for staff reductions in the communications center, Estes said, but as people retire he will carefully consider whether to replace them.

Cincinnatians can do their part, too, Estes said.

Upon reviewing 911 calls received by the center, one-third of the calls are not true emergencies, Estes said.

Think of it this way, Estes said: "Does (the situation) rise to the level of jeopardizing life?"

If not, Estes asks residents memorize 513-765-1212 or program it into a cell phone. It's the non-emergency number to dispatch that is also answered around the clock.