



Reclassification of the Public Safety Telecommunicator

BACKGROUND

Each year, millions of calls are made to 9-1-1. The estimated 98,000+ men and women dedicated to answering those calls are facing a time of great change. As the emergency communications ecosystem continues to evolve and public safety answering points (PSAPs)/emergency communications centers (ECCs) transition from a legacy environment to a next generation 9-1-1 (NG911) environment, their roles and responsibilities, and the skills required to execute in those roles, continue to evolve as well.

However, while the job expectations and skill requirements for public safety telecommunicators (PST) have changed, job descriptions have not been updated to reflect these changes. As a result, the PST role remains classified under the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) as an Office and Administrative Support Occupation.

FAQ: Reclassification of the Public Safety Telecommunicator

What is the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Standard Occupational Classification?

The Standard Occupational Classification, or SOC, is a statistical standard used by federal agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data. It is just one of several classification systems established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) 2018 SOC consists of four tiers:

- 23 major groups
- 98 minor groups
- 459 broad occupations
- 867 detailed occupations

Detailed occupations in the SOC with similar job duties, and in some cases skills, education and/or training are grouped together. Each worker in the U.S. is classified into only one of the 867 detailed occupations based on the tasks he or she performs.

How has the public safety telecommunicator (PST) role changed and how does this affect the SOC?

Over the course of the last decade, the role of a PST, as well as the skills required to execute the duties of the role, has changed dramatically as emergency communications centers (ECCs) have evolved and now transition to a next generation 9-1-1 (NG911) environment. As a result, today's PSTs must be:

- Computer literate
- Text proficient
- Social media savvy
- An expert multi-tasker
- Dependable and adaptable
- Calm and in control during stressful situations
- Tactful
- Patient
- Resilient
- Flexible
- Comfortable engaging frequently with the public
- Problem-solver

While the role of a PST is currently classified as an Office and Administrative Support Occupation under the SOC, this is no longer an accurate description of the role PSTs play in the ECC and emergency response.

In 2018, 4,466 dockets related to police, fire and emergency medical services (EMS) dispatcher jobs were sent to the BLS SOC, and national organizations approached both the BLS and OMB to reclassify the role of a PST. Ultimately, the BLS did not recommend for, and the OMB did not find enough evidence to reclassify the PST position based on the information provided.

What needs to be done differently to achieve reclassification?

The SOC classifies workers based on collected data on the tasks he or she performs on the job. During the 2018 reclassification effort, the committee pulled roughly 1,000 PST job descriptions for a mix of small, medium and large ECCs. These descriptions largely outlined work that was primarily clerical in nature, i.e. taking calls and entering information into a system. Often, the more technical aspects of both the job itself, and the required training for the job, were not described.

In order to achieve reclassification, it is critical that the job descriptions for the PST role used for evaluation by the OMB accurately describe the nature of the position today. It is recommended that all PSAPs/ECCs take steps to revise job descriptions and ensure that they reflect the following:

- Revision of position title from dispatcher or telecommunicator to public safety telecommunicator
- Thorough review of current job duties and tasks
- Alignment with current ECC operations
- Inclusion of soft skills including training application and knowledge, critical thinking, and decision making
- Documentation of required training, licensing and certifications

To support this effort, PSAPs/ECCs can review model job descriptions, consult other 911 agencies and conduct regular job task analyses to ensure training and job tasks are aligned with the current description of the role.

Where can I learn more about this effort?

For additional information on this effort and the steps that PSAPs/ECCs can take to better align job descriptions to the duties of a PST in support of reclassification of the role under the SOC, the National 911 Program has developed the report [Guidelines for Developing a Public Safety Telecommunicator Job Description](#).

This guide has been developed to describe the need for, and simplify development of, improved job descriptions for the industry. It includes template language and information on the duties of PSTs and enables organizations to modernize job descriptions to create better data to support reclassification.

To download the report, visit [911.gov](https://www.911.gov).