



TTY and You

How do your PSAP and telecommunicators measure up when it comes to responding to 9-1-1 TTY calls? Is the level of proficiency the same as for calls from hearing callers?

You must be careful not to fall into the mindset that just because you have not received a TTY call in 10 years, you never will. Make every effort to not only meet, but exceed the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which established a mandate requiring all PSAPs to be accessible to TTY callers.

The U.S. Census Bureau's most recent demographic reports show there are approximately 2.5 million deaf and 24 million hard-of-hearing people living in the United States. Add to this the growing population of next-generation senior citizens. Then factor in that 50 percent of citizens above 75 years of age will have some degree of hearing loss. That brings the percentage closer to 90 percent by the time these citizens reach the age of 85.

The days of pulling the TTY out of the closet and dusting it off are long gone. Why? Many TTY users have gained confidence in the accessibility of 9-1-1 services to meet their emergency needs, so usage is up. Also, in an effort to address agency-training needs, PSAPs have started partnerships with agencies in the deaf community. Their goal is to provide opportunities for telecommunicators and impaired individuals to work together to gain a better understanding of one another's needs and concerns. The advantages emerging from these types of partnerships are enhancing training programs, a better understanding of needs and higher confidence levels for both telecommunicators and TTY users.

If asked, most telecommunicators say they have a basic understanding of and can operate TTY equipment. However, they are not comfortable with receiving TTY calls. Nor do they believe their skills are proficient enough to communicate effectively, especially because TTY calls can be few and far between. Confidence and proficiency in handling TTY calls occurs only with regular, realistic practice opportunities that have clearly defined objectives. Practice opportunities must challenge the telecommunicators' abilities to translate into English TTY messages, to

change the wording of responses to make understanding easier and to understand and use approved abbreviations to communicate clearly.

Locating and working with deaf agencies enhance greatly an agency's ability to provide this ongoing training by having authentic TTY users make practice calls on a regular basis. As telecommunicators' knowledge, skills and abilities become more proficient and their confidence levels rise, TTY callers benefit, too.

They gain a better understanding of what to expect from the PSAP and they become more confident in the 9-1-1 system. The result will likely be an increase in the number of TTY calls at your PSAP in the future.

By Dianne Beatty, APCO Pennsylvania Chapter

Quiz

CDE Article – TTY and You

Name: _____ Date: _____

Agency: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

1. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that TTY callers have direct and equal access to 9-1-1.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. Telecommunicators must be trained for TTY calls at the same level of proficiency for hearing callers.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. There are millions of hearing disabled individuals in the United States.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. The more the deaf community trusts their local 9-1-1 calls, the more TTY 9-1-1 calls will be received in the PSAP.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Approximately 90% of citizens age 85 have some degree of hearing loss.
 - a. True
 - b. False