



Response to Questions on the FY 2010 County's Line of Business & Schools Program Review Processes Fall 2008

Request By: Public

Question: Describe the role of the Watch Officers. What are they watching and/or monitoring that is different from Police and Fire?

Response:

The Watch Officer program within the Office of Emergency Management is responsible for monitoring regional developments and communicating with County staff and the public. The Watch Center monitors a variety of local, regional, and national alert systems on a 24/7 basis and provides warnings as needed through reverse911, the Community Emergency Alert Network (CEAN), and the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. For example, the Watch Center Monitors several weather warning systems in an effort to keep the public and first-responders prepared for severe weather events. Given the County's proximity to major airports and facilities of national significance, the Watch Center monitors the Domestic Events Network (DEN) for potential emergencies that could threaten the County's infrastructure. Additionally, the Watch Center monitors the National Area Washington Alert System (NAWAS), which provides information from other watch offices throughout the National Capital Region within minutes. In the event of an emergency, the Watch Center is also able to deploy and coordinate volunteer teams to provide an additional layer of communication and support. The FY 2009 budget includes \$339,150 for 4/4.0 SYE merit and 2 limited term watch officers.

The Police Department and Fire Rescue Department currently deploy liaisons from their respective agencies to the Department of Public Safety Communications (DPSC) to provide a presence on the 911 call center floor. The role of the liaisons is to monitor developing situations on behalf of their respective agencies, and use operational knowledge and expertise to direct agency resources and operations as needed. \$532,855 is budgeted for 5/5.0 SYE Police Liaison Coordinator positions.

While the Department of Public Safety Communications and Watch Center have two distinct missions, the collocation of these functions within the McConnell Public Safety and Operations Center may present some additional opportunities for synergies. County staff is in the process of assessing what efficiencies and/or enhanced functionality this might present.