

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Office of Unified Communications**

Muriel Bowser  
Mayor



Karima Holmes  
Director

**Event background: 911 Service Outage**  
Update: Wednesday, August 31, 2016

**WHERE WE ARE NOW:**

- The contract employee responsible for the electrical outage has been removed from the facility and no longer is engaged with the District in any capacity.
- We are operating the regular and the back up 911 facilities to ensure redundancy of the system.
- Mayor Bowser has ordered a top to bottom review of the emergency response technology infrastructure. The Chief Technology Officer will lead that review.

**BACKGROUND**

The Office of Unified Communication (OUC) is committed to being fully transparent about the 911 outage and is working to ensure a similar outage does not occur again. The contract employee responsible for the electrical outage has been removed from the facility and no longer is engaged with the District in any capacity. At this time, the main Unified Communication Center (UCC) call center and back-up center are fully operational to ensure redundancy of the system. In addition, the OUC is working closely with the District's Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) to develop additional back-up systems due to Mayor Bowser's order of a top to bottom review of the emergency response technology infrastructure. Finally, the OUC is staffed by professional call takers and dispatchers who have been thoroughly trained to ensure continuity of services regardless of circumstances. During the outage, OUC call takers and dispatchers displayed professionalism while dealing with this unusual incident.

**OUTAGE CAUSE**

The preliminary investigation found a contract engineer, authorized to access control panels in the UCC server room, was attempting to locate a possible water leak. While the water detection alarm was sounding, the contractor did not find a water leak. During the process to silence the alarm, the wrong electrical control panel was accessed, which caused a system-wide loss of power. During this event, the 911 system was not able to receive 911 calls for approximately 100 minutes. For approximately 12 minutes during the outage, police officers, firefighters and emergency medical service providers were not able to use their portable radios. A back-up system was soon activated and first responders were able to communicate with each other in the field using radios.

**IMMEDIATE OUTAGE OUTCOMES**

The individual who caused this event no longer has access to District facilities. Other measures are being taken to ensure this kind of event does not occur again. For example, better signage has been placed on the control panels and enhanced training for building engineers and contractors is being instituted. Additional training will be implemented for maintenance personnel and contractors.



## **CALLS DURING OUTAGE**

On an average Saturday night/Sunday morning during this time frame, OUC normally receives around 300-350 calls. However, the total number of calls potentially lost during the approximately 100 minutes 911 is unavailable. Preliminary numbers indicate call volume during the outage was heightened; this was likely caused by people repeatedly dialing 911 and receiving no response. Early reports indicate District Fire and Emergency Medical Service (FEMS) received approximately 30 EMS calls and five fire calls on their 10 digit line; while, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) received five calls on their 10 digit line.

## **TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

- **11:35 p.m.:** OUC became aware of the 911 outage.
- **11:39 p.m.:** OUC call takers and dispatchers deployed from the main call center location at the Unified Communications Center to the back-up site.
- **11:42 p.m.:** HSEMA notified surrounding jurisdictions about the outage.
- **12:05 a.m.:** When OUC staff arrived at the back-up site, they realized 911 calls were not being properly routed to the back-up site.
- **12:07 a.m.:** OUC, along with our District Government public information partners, began notifying the public via social media to use 10 digit numbers for the MPD (202-727-9099) and FEMS (202-673-7197) for emergencies. In addition to social media, the message was sent via AlertDC, neighborhood listservs and through a scrolling message on channels 13 and 16. FEMS fire trucks were visible around neighborhoods so residents could request assistance.
- **12:25 a.m.:** OUC began receiving limited 911 calls at back-up site.
- **1:15 a.m.:** 911 service was fully restored at the back-up site.
- **1:33 a.m.:** OUC and HSEMA notified the public via social media and through news sites that 911 service had been restored. Callers were advised to stay on the line if they received hold information and noted the two, 10 digit numbers for MPD and FEMS were still available.
- **1:47 a.m.:** 911 service was fully restored to both the main 911 call center at the UCC and back-up site.