

shipments, and the importance of same-day delivery, which expands the role of agents. In addition, many job openings will be created to replace cargo and freight agents who leave the occupation.

Related Occupations

Cargo and freight agents plan and coordinate cargo shipments using airlines, trains, and trucks. They also arrange freight pickup with customers. Others who do similar work are couriers and messengers; shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks; weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers; truckdrivers and driver/sales workers; and Postal Service workers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of the State employment service.

(See introduction to the section on material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)

Couriers and Messengers

(O*NET 43-5021.00)

Nature of the Work

Couriers and messengers move and distribute information, documents, and small packages for businesses, institutions, and government agencies. They pick up and deliver letters, important business documents, or packages that need to be sent or received quickly within a local area. Trucks and vans are used for larger deliveries, such as legal caseloads and conference materials. By sending an item by courier or messenger, the sender ensures that it reaches its destination the same day or even within the hour. Couriers and messengers also deliver items that the sender is unwilling to entrust to other means of delivery, such as important legal or financial documents, passports, airline tickets, or medical samples to be tested.

Couriers and messengers receive their instructions either by reporting to their office in person, by telephone, by two-way radio, or wireless data service. They then pick up the item and carry it to its destination. After each pickup or delivery, they check in with dispatch to receive instructions. Sometimes dispatch will contact them while they are between stops; they may be routed to go past a stop that has very recently called in a delivery. Since most couriers and messengers work on commission, they are carrying more than one package at any given time of the day. Consequently, most couriers and messengers spend much of their time outdoors or in their vehicle. They usually maintain records of deliveries and often obtain signatures from the persons receiving the items.

Most couriers and messengers deliver items within a limited geographic area, such as a city or metropolitan area. Items that need to go longer distances usually are sent by mail or by an overnight delivery service. Some couriers and messengers carry items only for their employer, which typically might be a law firm, bank, or financial institution. Others may act as part of an organization's internal mail system and mainly carry items among an organization's buildings or entirely within one building. Many couriers and messengers work for messenger or courier services; for a fee, they pick up items from anyone and deliver them to specified destinations within a local area. Most are paid on a commission basis.

Couriers and messengers reach their destination by several methods. Many drive vans or cars or ride motorcycles. A few travel by foot, especially in urban areas or when making deliveries nearby. In congested urban areas, messengers often use bicycles to make deliveries. Bicycle messengers usually are employed by messenger or courier services. Although e-mail and fax machines can deliver



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information faster than couriers and messengers can and a great deal of information is available over the Internet, an electronic copy cannot substitute for the original document for many types of business transactions.

Employment

Couriers and messengers together held about 141,000 jobs in 2000. About 9 percent of couriers and messengers worked for law firms, another 10 percent worked for hospitals and medical and dental laboratories, and 29 percent were employed by local and long-distance trucking establishments. Financial institutions, such as commercial banks, savings institutions, and credit unions, employed 10 percent. The rest were employed in a variety of other industries. Technically, many messengers are self-employed independent contractors because they provide their vehicles and, to a certain extent, set their own schedules but, in many respects, they are like employees because they usually work for one company.

Job Outlook

Employment of couriers and messengers is expected to decline through 2010 despite an increasing volume of parcels, business documents, promotional materials, and other written information that must be handled and delivered as the economy expands. Employment of couriers and messengers will continue to be adversely impacted by the more widespread use of electronic information-handling technology. For example, fax machines that allow copies of documents to be immediately sent across town or around the world have become standard office equipment. The transmission of information using e-mail also has become commonplace and will continue to reduce the demand for messengers. Many documents, forms, and application that people used to have delivered by hand are now downloaded from the Internet. However, couriers and messengers still will be needed to transport materials that cannot be sent electronically—such as legal documents, blueprints and other oversized materials, large multipage documents, securities, passports, financial statements, and airline tickets. Also, they still will be required by medical and dental laboratories to pick up and deliver medical samples, specimens, and other materials.

Related Occupations

Messengers and couriers deliver letters, parcels, and other items. They also keep accurate records of their work. Others who do similar work are Postal Service workers; truckdrivers and driver/

sales workers; shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks; and cargo and freight agents.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of the State employment service. Persons interested in courier and messenger jobs also may contact messenger and courier services, mail-order firms, banks, printing and publishing firms, utility companies, retail stores, or other large firms.

(See introduction to the section on material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)

Dispatchers

(O*NET 43-5031.00, 43-5032.00)

Nature of the Work

Dispatchers schedule and dispatch workers, equipment, or service vehicles for conveyance of materials or passengers. They keep records, logs, and schedules of the calls they receive, the transportation vehicles they monitor and control, and the actions they take. They maintain information on each call, and then prepare a detailed report on all activities occurring during the shift. Many dispatchers employ computer-aided dispatch systems to accomplish these tasks. The work of dispatchers varies greatly, depending on the industry in which they work.

Regardless of where they work, all dispatchers are assigned a specific territory and have responsibility for all communications within this area. Many work in teams, especially in large communications centers or companies. One person usually handles all dispatching calls to the response units or company drivers, while the other members of the team usually receive the incoming calls and deal with the public.

Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers, also called public safety dispatchers, monitor the location of emergency services personnel from any one or all of the jurisdiction's emergency services departments. They dispatch the appropriate type and number of units in response to calls for assistance. Dispatchers, or call takers, often are the first people the public contacts when they call for emergency assistance. If certified for emergency medical services, the dispatcher may provide medical instruction to those on the scene of the emergency until the medical staff arrives.

Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers work in a variety of settings; they may work in a police station, a fire station, a hospital, or, increasingly, in a centralized communications center. In many areas, the police department serves as the communications center. In these situations, all 911 emergency calls go to the police department, where a dispatcher handles the police calls and screens the others before transferring them to the appropriate service.

When handling calls, dispatchers carefully question each caller to determine the type, seriousness, and location of the emergency. This information is posted either electronically by computer or, with decreasing frequency, by hand. It is communicated immediately to uniformed or supervisory personnel, who quickly decide on the priority of the incident, the kind and number of units needed, and the location of the closest and most suitable units available. Usually, dispatchers constitute the communications workforce on a shift. Typically, there is a team of call takers who answer calls and relay the information to be dispatched. Responsibility then shifts to the dispatchers who send response units to the scene and monitor the activity of the public safety personnel answering the dispatch. During the course of the shift, dispatchers may rotate these functions.

When appropriate, dispatchers stay in close contact with other service providers—for example, a police dispatcher would monitor



Projected employment growth of public safety dispatchers stems from increased demand for emergency services.

the response of the fire department when there is a major fire. In a medical emergency, dispatchers keep in close touch not only with the dispatched units, but also with the caller. They may give extensive pre-arrival first aid instructions while the caller is waiting for the ambulance. They continuously give updates on the patient's condition to the ambulance personnel, and often serve as a link between the medical staff in a hospital and the emergency medical technicians in the ambulance. (A separate statement on emergency medical technicians and paramedics appears elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Other dispatchers coordinate deliveries, service calls, and related activities for a variety of firms. *Truck dispatchers*, who work for local and long-distance trucking companies, coordinate the movement of trucks and freight between cities. They direct the pickup and delivery activities of drivers. They receive customers' requests for pickup and delivery of freight; consolidate freight orders into truckloads for specific destinations; assign drivers and trucks; and draw up routes and pickup and delivery schedules. *Bus dispatchers* make sure that local and long-distance buses stay on schedule. They handle all problems that may disrupt service, and dispatch other buses or arrange for repairs in order to restore service and schedules. *Train dispatchers* ensure the timely and efficient movement of trains according to train orders and schedules. They must be aware of track switch positions, track maintenance areas, and the location of other trains running on the track. *Taxicab dispatchers*, or starters, dispatch taxis in response to requests for service and keep logs on all road service calls. *Tow truck dispatchers* take calls for emergency road service. They relay the nature of the problem to a nearby service station or a tow truck service and see to it that the emergency road service is completed. *Gas and water service dispatchers* monitor gaslines and water mains and send out service trucks and crews to take care of emergencies.

Employment

Dispatchers held 254,000 jobs in 2000. About one-third were police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers, almost all of whom worked for State and local governments—primarily for local police and fire departments. Most of the remaining dispatchers worked for local and long-distance trucking companies and buslines; air carriers; wholesale establishments; railroads; taxicab companies; and companies providing business services.

Although dispatching jobs are found throughout the country, most dispatchers work in urban areas, where large communications centers and businesses are located.