

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.)

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## Dispatchers

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

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### 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.

### Job Outlook

Employment of dispatchers is expected to grow as fast as the average for all occupations through 2010. In addition to those resulting from job growth, openings will arise from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Projected employment growth of police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers, or public safety dispatchers, stems from increased demand for emergency services. Many districts are consolidating their communications centers into a shared, areawide facility. Individuals with computer skills and experience will have a greater opportunity for employment as public safety dispatchers.

Population growth and economic expansion are expected to spur employment growth for other types of dispatchers. Employment of some dispatchers is more adversely affected by economic downturns than that of other dispatchers. When economic activity falls, demand for transportation services declines. As a result, taxicab, train, and truck dispatchers may experience layoffs or a shortened workweek, and jobseekers may have some difficulty finding entry-level jobs. Employment of tow truck dispatchers, on the other hand, is seldom affected by general economic conditions because of the emergency nature of their business.

### Related Occupations

Other occupations that involve directing and controlling the movement of vehicles, freight, and personnel, as well as distributing information and messages, include air traffic controllers, communications equipment operators, customer service representatives, and reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks.

### Sources of Additional Information

For further information on training and certification for police, fire, and emergency dispatchers, contact:

- ▶ National Academy of Emergency Medical Dispatch, 139 East South Temple, Suite 530, Salt Lake City, UT 84111. Internet: <http://www.emergencydispatch.org>
  - ▶ Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, 2040 S. Ridgewood, South Daytona, FL 32119-2257. Internet: <http://www.apcointl.org>
  - ▶ International Municipal Signal Association, 165 East Union St., P.O. Box 539, Newark, NY 14513-0539. Internet: <http://www.imsasafety.org>
- For information on train dispatchers, contact:
- ▶ American Train Dispatchers Association, 1370 Ontario St., Cleveland, OH 44113. Internet: <http://www.ble.org/atdd/about-atdd.asp>

Information on job opportunities for police, fire, and emergency dispatchers is available from personnel offices of State and local governments or police departments. Information about work opportunities for other types of dispatchers is available from local employers and State employment service offices.

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

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## Meter Readers, Utilities

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(O\*NET 43-5041.00)

### Nature of the Work

Meter readers read electric, gas, water, or steam consumption meters and record the volume used. They serve both residential and commercial consumers, either walking or driving along the designated route. Their duties include inspecting the meters and their connections for any defects or damage, supplying meter repair and maintenance workers with the necessary information to fix damaged meters, and keeping track of the average usage and record reasons for any extreme fluctuations in volume.



*A worker reads a meter outside a home.*

Meter readers are constantly aware of any abnormal behavior or consumption that might indicate an unauthorized connection. They may turn off service for questionable behavior or nonpayment of charges, and also are responsible for turning on service for new occupants. They usually keep a record of receipt and completion of meter service.

### Employment

Meter readers held about 49,000 jobs in 2000. About half were employed by electric, gas, and water utilities. Most of the rest were employed in local government, reading water meters or meters for other government-owned utilities.

### Job Outlook

Employment of meter readers is expected to decline through 2010. New automated meter reading (AMR) systems allow meters to be monitored and billed from a central point, reducing the need for meter readers. However, because it will be many years before AMR systems can be implemented in all locations, there still will be some openings for meter readers, mainly to replace workers who leave the occupation.

### Related Occupations

Other workers responsible for the distribution and control of utilities include powerplant operators, distributors, and dispatchers.

### Sources of Additional Information

Information on employment as a meter reader, and on automatic meter reading technology, can be obtained from:

- ▶ Automatic Meter Reading Association. Internet: <http://www.amra-intl.org>

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## Production, Planning, and Expediting Clerks

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(O\*NET 43-5061.00)

### Nature of the Work

Production, planning, and expediting clerks coordinate and expedite the flow of information, work, and materials within or among offices. Most of their work is done according to production, work,