BCC Fire Rescue Emergency Dispatch Audit

Inspector General Department

Gary J. Cooney, Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

Audit Report

Terri W. Freeman, CPA, CIA, CISA, CRMA
Inspector General

Audit Conducted by:

Velia Muruaga,
Audit Manager

Lisa Yang, CPA,
Senior Auditor

Kristine Donnelly, IAP
Staff Auditor/Data Analyst

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Inspector General Department
Office of Gary J. Cooney
Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
550 West Main Street, Post Office Box 7800
Tavares, Florida 32778-7800
Phone: (352) 253-4930 Fax: (352) 742-4534

Date: October 16, 2026

To: Board of County Commissioners

Subject: Fire Rescue Emergency Dispatch Audit

Board of County Commissioners,

The audit of Fire Rescue Emergency Dispatch, as scheduled in the Clerk's Annual Inspector General Audit Plan, is complete.

Overall, the controls are working well. One opportunity is identified in the report that will further strengthen the control environment.

We appreciate the cooperation and invaluable assistance provided by Kimberly Stephens, Deputy Chief of Emergency Dispatch, and Joanna Buchanan, Division Chief of Emergency Dispatch.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri W. Freeman
Inspector General

cc: Gary J. Cooney, Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller
Denise Bell, Chief Deputy Clerk
Jennifer Barker, County Manager
Thomas Carpenter, Assistant County Manager
David Kilbury, Public Safety Director
Kimberly Stephens, Deputy Chief of Emergency Dispatch
Joanna Buchanan, Division Chief of Emergency Dispatch
Gregory Holcomb, Office of Public Safety Support Director

Background

The Lake County Office of Fire Rescue provides fire suppression, emergency medical services (EMS), rescue, and other emergency response services to more than 400,000 residents and visitors throughout Lake County.

The Office's Emergency Dispatch Division serves as the secondary public safety answering point (PSAP) and dispatch center for Fire Rescue and EMS operations. The division is responsible for receiving 911 emergency and non-emergency calls, prioritizing incidents, dispatching appropriate emergency resources, providing pre-arrival emergency medical and fire instructions, and maintaining communications with responding units throughout an incident.

The Emergency Dispatch Division supports coordinated emergency response throughout the county by using computer-aided dispatch technology and established dispatch protocols to ensure the timely and effective deployment of Fire Rescue resources.

Operational Strengths

The audit identified several operational strengths that contribute to the effectiveness of Lake County Fire Rescue Emergency Dispatch. The center holds dual accreditation from the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) as both an Emergency Medical Dispatch Center of Excellence and an Emergency Fire Dispatch Center of Excellence. In addition, the Florida Department of Health has approved the center as an official training site for the State of Florida 9-1-1 Public Safety Telecommunicator Program. These recognitions demonstrate compliance with established professional standards and a commitment to maintaining high-quality emergency dispatch services.

Fire Rescue management has established a quality assurance program that provides ongoing oversight of call processing and dispatch performance. Performance metrics are routinely monitored and analyzed to assess operational performance, identify trends, and support management’s continuous improvement efforts. Collectively, these practices demonstrate the center's commitment to continuous improvement and the delivery of reliable emergency communication services.

The auditors also observed initiatives that support employee engagement and organizational culture, including telecommunicator appreciation activities and employee recognition programs. One example is the center's recognition mural honoring telecommunicators who have assisted with cardiac arrests or emergency childbirth calls, with each individual's name added to a commemorative display. These initiatives acknowledge employee contributions and reinforce the important role telecommunicators serve in providing emergency response services.

Objective and Scope

The Audit objectives were to:

1) To determine compliance with the following statutes:
   - Fla. Stat. § 401.465 and Chapter 64J-3 of the Fla. Admin. Code establish the certification, training, and continuing education requirements for 911 public safety telecommunicators.
   - Fla. Stat. § 365.171(12) requires public agencies and public safety agencies to maintain the confidentiality of records and information that could identify individuals requesting or reporting emergency services through the 911 system, while permitting disclosure to other public safety agencies as authorized by law.
2) To assess the design and execution of key controls that management has implemented to mitigate significant risks in the following processes:
   - Manage Performance Monitoring & Quality Assurance – Establish, implement, and maintain processes to monitor operational performance related to response to special calls and evaluate the effectiveness of key activities and controls.
   - Manage Business Continuity Planning / Disaster Recovery – Implement and maintain processes and key controls to sustain or promptly restore critical operations following a disruption.
   - Manage Call Intake & Triage – Design, implement, and maintain processes and key controls to ensure effective monitoring and accuracy of call classification.
   - Manage Communications Coordination - Design, implement, and maintain processes and key controls to ensure coordination with interagency and mutual aid requests.
   - Manage Incident Documentation & Reporting – Design, implement, and maintain processes and key controls to ensure incident information is accurately documented, maintained, and reported in accordance with policies, procedures, and applicable regulatory requirements.
   - Manage Resource Tracking – Design, implement, and maintain processes and key controls to ensure appropriate levels of dispatchers to maintain effective emergency response.
   - Manage Training & Certification – Design, implement, and maintain processes and key controls to ensure personnel receive required training, maintain applicable certifications, and possess the knowledge and competencies necessary to perform their assigned responsibilities.
   - Manage Data Security – Design, implement, and maintain processes and key controls to protect the confidentiality and integrity of restricted information.
   - Manage Application-Level Access – Design, implement, and maintain processes and key controls to ensure access to applications and system functionality is appropriately authorized and revoked.

Scope: The audit covered the period from August 1, 2024, through July 15, 2026.

The audit did not include a review of the Computer-Aided Dispatch system, as this review is conducted as part of the Public Safety IT General Controls Review and the Public Safety Internal Penetration Test and Vulnerability Assessment. Fraud risk related to payroll records or timesheets will be assessed during

the UKG timekeeping data analytics audit. Public Relations risks will be covered in a future audit of the Communications Department, which is responsible for managing this process.

The audit was conducted in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors Global Internal Audit Standards (“Standards”). The Standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient and appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for the conclusions regarding the audit objectives. To meet this requirement, auditors interviewed key personnel, reviewed relevant policies, procedures, and records, and performed detailed testing of transactions and controls. Auditors also analyzed data, verified supporting documentation, and observed processes in operation where appropriate.

In addition, the auditors relied on the accreditation reviews conducted by the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) as audit evidence for the center's monitoring and accuracy of call classification, coordination with partner agencies and mutual aid requests, and compliance with training standards.

Conclusion

Overall, controls are functioning well. One opportunity is identified at the end of the report that will further strengthen the control environment.

Opportunity to Improve Control Environment

Following a power outage incident on 8/5/2024, management proactively developed a Continuity of Operations After-Action Report and Improvement Plan. The plan recommended conducting quarterly or semiannual drills with all Communications Center staff to ensure they are continually exposed to various emergency scenarios and can implement the County's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) appropriately. However, drills have not been conducted.

Failure to conduct emergency scenario drills increases the risk that personnel will be unfamiliar with established continuity procedures, resulting in delayed, inconsistent, or ineffective response during actual emergencies. This may lead to operational disruptions, impaired emergency service delivery, and increased safety risks to the public and first responders.

Agreed Upon Action

Management agrees that an operational backup site with periodic testing is an important component of the County's COOP and supports the recommendation for annual testing. Currently, backup CAD and radio equipment are maintained and tested regularly to ensure they are operational and ready for deployment. Additionally, an evacuation plan is included in the Emergency Dispatch Standard Operating Guidelines, and relocation "go kits" are maintained and readily accessible for staff. During 2025, Lake County upgraded the County's 911 call-taking software, with the new system going live in February 2026. As part of that project, new backup call-taking equipment was purchased.

The Leesburg Police Department has been designated as the backup 911 facility for Emergency Dispatch. In July 2026, all Lake County PSAPs met with Greg Holcomb, Lake County 911 Coordinator. He advised that the new Pelican Cases, which will be used to support our backup 911 call-taking operations, will be ready for distribution by the end of August 2026. Once the equipment is available, we will conduct a full-scale exercise to test the deployment of equipment and staff to the designated backup site.

Target Completion Date: This exercise was completed on September 15, 2026.