

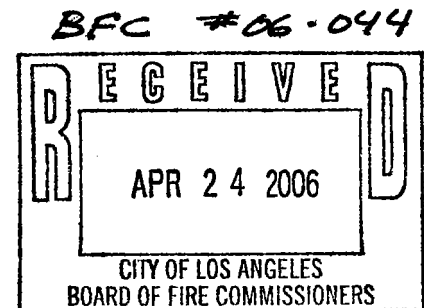
OFFICE OF  
CONTROLLER

LAURA N. CHICK  
CONTROLLER

200 N. MAIN STREET, RM 300  
LOS ANGELES 90012  
(213) 978-7200  
[www.lacity.org/ctr](http://www.lacity.org/ctr)

April 24, 2006

The Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa  
The Honorable Rockard J. Delgadillo  
The Honorable Members of the City Council  
City Hall  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012



Dear Mayor Villaraigosa, City Attorney Delgadillo, Members of the City Council:

The 3,400 sworn firefighters of the City of Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) are highly trained, experienced and dedicated in fighting and preventing fires, conducting search and rescue missions and providing emergency medical treatment. It is extremely important that we optimize the use of each and every firefighter in providing critical services to the people of Los Angeles. To that end, today I am releasing an audit which reviews the use of sworn firefighters in the LAFD's dispatch center and the practice of assigning sworn firefighters in non-emergency special duty positions.

The LAFD utilizes more than 300 sworn firefighters to perform duties outside of fire stations or direct rescue activities. Of these 300 firefighters the audit found approximately 80 positions that could be converted to non-sworn employees: 62 are call takers in the LAFD's Operations Control and 18 have special duty assignments.

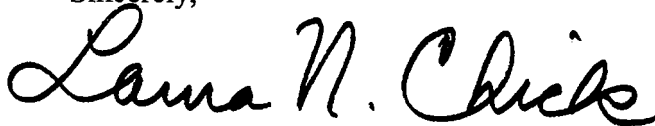
These positions could be converted efficiently and effectively to non-sworn civilians without sacrificing the LAFD's high standards of service. Not only will this result in annual savings of \$2.3 to \$3.8 million it will enable the redeployment of highly qualified sworn personnel to fire stations across our City.

The Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa  
The Honorable Rockard J. Delgadillo  
The Honorable Members of the City Council  
April 24, 2006  
page two

As a City Councilmember and Chair of the Council's Public Safety Committee in the 1990's, I am acutely aware of the arguments that were raised against hiring more civilians as call takers for 911. However, my audit found that most of the key arguments raised over ten years ago are no longer relevant. Further, the eight benchmark cities that were used as comparisons in a 1995 LAFD study to argue against civilianization have all successfully converted to civilian call takers.

The Fire Commission should immediately begin to plan an implementation strategy with the Mayor, City Council and key stakeholders to address hiring civilians as call takers at the LAFD's dispatch. The audit also recommends that the Fire Commission direct the LAFD to conduct the appropriate studies to begin the process of converting 62 of the 75 call taker positions to civilians. This prudent approach... a mix of civilian and sworn firefighters... will ensure the highest quality service while saving taxpayer dollars and redeploying firefighters and paramedics to our neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura N. Chick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

LAURA N. CHICK  
City Controller



OFFICE OF  
CONTROLLER

LAURA N. CHICK  
CONTROLLER

200 N. MAIN STREET, RM 300  
LOS ANGELES 90012  
(213) 978-7200  
[www.lacity.org/ctr](http://www.lacity.org/ctr)

April 24, 2006

William R. Bamattre, Fire Chief  
Los Angeles Fire Department  
200 N. Main St., Room 1800  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Chief Bamattre:

Enclosed is the final report of the Review of the Los Angeles Fire Department Dispatch Staffing and Special Duty Assignments, conducted by Sjoberg Evashenk Consulting, Inc. A draft of this report was provided to you on April 10, 2006. Comments provided by you at the April 17, 2006, exit conference were evaluated and considered prior to finalizing the report.

Please review the final audit report and advise the Controller's Office by May 24, 2006, on planned actions you will take to implement the recommendations. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me (213) 978-7392.

Sincerely,

FARID SAFFAR, CPA  
Director of Auditing

Chief William R. Bamattre  
April 24, 2006  
Page 2

Enclosure

cc: Robin Kramer, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor  
Jimmy Blackman, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor  
Maurice Suh, Deputy Mayor  
Dalila T. Sotelo, President, Board of Fire Commissioners  
Jill Furillo, Commissioner, Board of Fire Commissioners  
Andrew Friedman, Commissioner, Board of Fire Commissioners  
Genethia Hudley-Hayes, Commissioner, Board of Fire Commissioners  
Casimiro U. Tolentino, Commissioner, Board of Fire Commissioners  
William T Fujioka, City Administrative Officer  
Gerry F. Miller, Chief Legislative Analyst  
Frank Martinez, City Clerk  
Independent City Auditors



April 24, 2006

The Honorable Laura N. Chick, Controller  
Office of the Controller, City of Los Angeles  
200 N. Main Street, Room 300  
Los Angeles, CA 90012


Dear Ms. Chick:

We respectfully submit our report entitled, "Review of the Los Angeles Fire Department Dispatch Staffing and Special Duty Assignments." This report was prepared on behalf of the Los Angeles City Controller by Sjoberg Evashenk Consulting, Inc., and includes our findings and recommendations.

Our report addresses the Los Angeles Fire Department's use of sworn firefighters in its dispatch center and its practice of assigning sworn firefighters to non-emergency special duty positions. We found that the Department should consider converting about 80 of these positions to civilian staff, thus generating cost savings and redeploying trained firefighters to mission-critical fire suppression and emergency medical services.

Sjoberg Evashenk Consulting was pleased to work with the City Controller's Office on this audit, and appreciate the assistance of your staff.

Respectfully submitted,

  
KURT R. SJOBERG  
Chairman

# **Los Angeles City Controller**

---

## **Review of the Los Angeles Fire Department Dispatch Staffing and Special Duty Assignments**

**April 24, 2006**



---

455 Capitol Mall • Suite 700 • Sacramento, California • 95814 • Tel 916.443.1300 • Fax 916.443.1350

## Executive Summary

---

Sjoberg Evashenk Consulting has completed an audit of the management practices at the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD), under contract with the Office of the City Controller's Internal Audit Division. The objectives of the audit were to evaluate and assess LAFD's:

- ◆ Use of sworn firefighters in the LAFD's dispatch center; and,
- ◆ Practice of assigning sworn firefighters in non-emergency special duty positions.

The audit did not assess the LAFD's operational activities or readiness, such as its fire suppression or emergency medical transportation operations. The scope of this audit focuses on staffing issues, whereas an earlier audit of LAFD's management activities addressed human relations and workplace harassment areas. (See the Controller's report titled, *Review of the Los Angeles Fire Department Management Practices*, dated January 26, 2006.)

### Overview

LAFD's 3,400 sworn firefighters are highly trained and experienced in fire suppression and prevention, search and rescue, and emergency medical treatment. Each firefighter has completed a rigorous 17-week training academy and a one-year probation period before reaching permanent sworn civil service status. Moreover, extensive training to maintain these skills at the level needed to provide public safety is part of daily life in the LAFD's 103 fire stations and other specialized units. Not only are LAFD's sworn members trained on firefighting techniques, but most are also Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) and some are paramedics.

Consequently, the objectives of this study are to identify opportunities within LAFD where sworn firefighters currently performing non-firefighting activities can be redeployed to again provide essential first response services to the residents of the City of Los Angeles. In doing so, LAFD can assure the "highest and best use" of these essential fire and medical emergency personnel while at the same time partially address its continuous need to hire new firefighters. In most cases, civilian replacements will cost less – and in a few areas, civilian employees will also provide needed skills and continuity not possessed by the incumbent sworn members.

LAFD utilizes more than 300 sworn firefighters to perform duties outside of fire stations or direct fire rescue activities throughout the department. We reviewed the use of sworn firefighters in a variety of capacities to identify positions in which non-sworn, skilled civilians could effectively and efficiently perform these activities – thus enabling LAFD to redeploy the firefighters to fire suppression, rescue or emergency medical services.

Of these 300 firefighters, we found that most perform services like fire inspections, academy training or strategic planning where their fire fighting backgrounds are essential to LAFD's mission. However, we did identify approximately 80 positions currently staffed by sworn firefighters that could be converted to non-sworn civilian positions. The

majority of these positions are firefighter dispatchers in LAFD's Operations Control Division, with the remainder being sworn members holding special duty assignments throughout the department. (A "special duty" assignment is often a two-year rotation, and upon completion, the member returns to his or her former assignment. While special a duty position can be assigned to sworn members of any level – the majority of these positions are at the Firefighter III and Inspector levels and to a lesser extent, captain and chief levels.)

## Civilianizing 80 Firefighter Positions

We believe that 80 positions currently staffed by sworn firefighters could be efficiently and effectively converted to non-sworn civilian positions without negatively impacting LAFD's delivery of essential services or creating a degradation of public safety. The majority of these positions (62) are dispatcher "call takers" in the Operations Control Division's dispatch center, with the remainder being sworn members holding special duty assignments (18) throughout the department.

Such firefighter redeployments are not unique around the United States. In fact, civilian dispatchers are used by fire departments throughout the country, including all eight of the major metropolitan fire departments considered benchmarks to LAFD<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the special duty assignments we identify for civilianization entail performing duties where the specific skills and experiences demanded are better suited to permanent civil service personnel and not rotational firefighter assignees.

Replacing these 80 firefighters with non-sworn civilian employees will, in addition to generating savings of at least \$2.3 to \$3.8 million annually, result in redeployment of highly trained firefighters to mission-specific duties aligned more closely with their training and expertise in fire suppression, rescue or emergency medical services.

While our recommendation to fill these positions with non-sworn civilian employees will generate savings, we are not suggesting that the sworn firefighters removed from these positions would leave the LAFD. Instead, these firefighters should be redeployed to the highest and best use of their skills and abilities into mission-specific duties that will help alleviate the LAFD's continuous need for skilled firefighters. Consequently, benefits accruing to converting positions to civilian personnel will be long-term and result from reducing the demand of hiring and training recruit firefighters, and the lower salary and retirement costs for most of the civilian replacements.

We organized our analysis of redeploying sworn firefighters to other duties by replacing them with non-sworn civilians in three chapters:

Chapter I	--	LAFD's Dispatch Activities
Chapter II	--	Special Duty Assignments
Chapter III	--	Conclusion and Recommendations

---

<sup>1</sup> The eight fire departments are Atlanta Fire Department, Chicago Fire Department, Houston Fire Department, Los Angeles County Fire Department, Metropolitan Dade County, Florida Fire Department, Orange County Fire Department, Phoenix Fire Department, and San Jose Fire Department.



## **Chapter I – LAFD’s Dispatch Activities**

LAFD’s Operations Control Division (OCD), within the Bureau of Support Services, provides call taker and dispatch functions for the department. Led by an Assistant Chief who oversees three battalion commanders, nine captains and 75 firefighters, OCD handles about 72,000 calls per month. Most calls are 9-1-1 emergencies initially received by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and forwarded to OCD when they involve fire or medical emergencies.

Over ten years ago, after a consultant (DMG) engaged by the Mayor, CAO and CLA recommended civilianizing LAFD’s dispatch activities to save about \$4.1 million annually, the LAFD hired another consultant (Buracker) to study it’s Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) dispatch functions. In this second report, Buracker noted that while civilianizing the operations would save about \$660,000 per year, other factors needed to be considered, including an unreliable computer-aided dispatching system; the benefit of using permanently disabled and light duty firefighters in the dispatch center; a potential degradation of service quality; and, the development, cost and delivery of training civilian replacements. Based on these issues, Buracker concluded that LAFD should not change the staffing composition at that time. In 2006, LAFD’s dispatch operation continues to be staffed by sworn firefighters.

We analyzed and updated the key issues raised by the Buracker study and found that the most critical areas raised no longer exist 10 years later. Moreover, we compared the current operations of the LAFD’s dispatch activities against industry standards and benchmarks, and evaluated the sources of the LAFD’s reticence to civilianizing. As a result, we believe that civilianizing 62 of the 75 dispatcher “call taker” positions is now viable and should save from \$2.3 to \$3.8 million annually, as well as provide other opportunities to improve LAFD’s dispatch activities.

Specifically, we found:

- ◆ Upgrades to software have improved the reliability of LAFD’s computer-aided dispatch system, reducing the system failures requiring specialized firefighter skills Buracker identified in 1995.
- ◆ Of the eight “Benchmark Partners” identified by Buracker for comparison to LAFD, all eight have civilian call takers with a combination of sworn or civilian commanders. Most of these departments converted in the 1990s and cited cost savings as one advantage of civilianizing.
- ◆ Salary and benefit costs to replace 62 firefighter dispatchers on 24-hour shifts with the equivalent number of civilians needed on 8.5-hour shifts to provide coverage for LAFD’s call volume would be at least \$2.3 to \$3.8 million less each year after incurring costs of initial training.
- ◆ Los Angeles Police Department’s Communications Dispatch Center (the City’s first contact for 9-1-1 emergency calls) has a comprehensive training program for civilian Police Service Representatives (PSR) that could be built upon to train fire and medical emergency call takers. Alternatively, specific Emergency Medical

Dispatcher's training curricula from industry sources or from civilian fire department dispatch operations could be utilized.

- ◆ According to the Fire Chief, 80 percent of LAFD's incidents are non-fire related (e.g. medical emergencies), necessitating a new paradigm regarding firefighting skills. Ten years ago, many of Buracker's conclusions and LAFD's reluctance to civilianize were based on the benefit of having traditional firefighting skills in the OCD for fire incident command and control that is different under this new paradigm.
- ◆ About 23 of the OCD's dispatchers are on restricted duty with an average 11 years tenure with LAFD. If their positions are civilianized, we believe they can either remain with OCD to fill some of the 26 firefighter positions not civilianized or be reassigned to other non-physically demanding positions throughout the LAFD, such as fire inspections, arson investigations, disaster preparedness or planning.

## **Chapter II – Special Duty Assignments**

According to the LAFD, special duty assignments are often two-year rotations within the LAFD organization that require the specialized skills of uniformed employees in a variety of areas outside of the fire station platoon duty environment. Special duty assignments are located in LAFD's administrative offices at City Hall East, fire prevention field offices and training centers, and include assignments such as LAFD planning, discipline, fire inspections, disaster preparedness and recruit training. There are also other administrative-type special duty assignments such as workers compensation, risk management, and medical liaison. We found that most special duty assignments within the LAFD require the specialized skills of trained firefighters. However, certain positions we identified where firefighting skills and experience are not required could be converted to civilian staff.

After an initial review to determine if any special duty assignments could be performed by non-sworn civilian employees, we found that all special duty assignments within the Bureau of Emergency Services (25 positions) and the Bureau of Fire Prevention (169 positions) should remain sworn firefighters, since the duties and activities undertaken by these special duty assignees clearly required firefighting, rescue or emergency medical skills. With these two bureaus excluded, we were left with a total of 128 special duty assignments to assess whether non-sworn civilian staff could efficiently and effectively conduct the duties required of the position – thus allowing LAFD to redeploy these trained firefighters to front-line fire suppression, rescue or medical emergency duties.

As a result of our review of the job tasks and descriptions for each position, we believe that 18 special duty assignments can be more efficiently and effectively conducted by non-sworn civilian employees. Specifically, we identified the following positions:

- ◆ **Medical Liaison Officers:** Replace three special duty captains with three trained civilians.
- ◆ **Wellness Unit Officer:** Replace a special duty captain with a trained civilian.
- ◆ **Risk Management Officers:** Replace one special duty battalion commander and one special duty captain with two trained civilians (supervisor and one worker).

- ◆ **Workers Compensation Officers:** Replace two special duty captains with two trained civilians.
- ◆ **Quality Control Dispatch Officers:** Replace six special duty paramedic firefighters (one captain and five firefighters) with trained civilian paramedics.
- ◆ **Community Relations Officer:** Replace one special duty captain with a trained civilian employee.
- ◆ **Operations Executive Officer:** Replace a special duty disciplinary battalion commander with a trained supervisory investigator.
- ◆ **Advocate Officers:** Replace two special duty captains with trained investigators.

### **Chapter III – Conclusion and Recommendations**

LAFD has a long history of using sworn firefighters in support or administrative roles throughout its five bureaus. Most of these assignments generate benefits to both the department and the firefighter by matching highly skilled sworn members to departmental needs that could not be accomplished with civilians or less experienced firefighters. In these instances, taking skilled firefighters out of their direct roles in fire suppression, rescue or medical emergencies is organizationally justified.

However, we identified some positions staffed by firefighters that could be efficiently and effectively filled with civilian civil service personnel. Although the number of such positions is small (80 firefighters) in comparison to LAFD's department-wide total of 3,400 firefighters, redeploying these sworn members to first-line firefighting, rescue or emergency medical services results in the highest and best use of their collective training and expertise.

Most of the positions that we believe could be converted to civilian staff are call takers within the Operations Control Division's 9-1-1 dispatch unit. We believe that 62 of the 88 sworn firefighters (commanders, captains, resource controllers and call takers) can be civilianized. The remaining 26 firefighters would remain in command positions or would direct the dispatching of LAFD resources to the emergency incident. Not only would this allow LAFD to redeploy the remaining firefighters to first-line duty, but it could also generate an annual savings to the City of at least \$2.3 million to \$3.8 million. Converting from 24-hour per day shifts to 8, 10 or 12 hour shifts also provides an opportunity to place the appropriate number of staff on each shift to address peaks and valleys experienced in call volume rather than have an equal number of staff for the entire 24-hour period.

Currently, none of the eight LAFD benchmark partner municipal fire departments use a 24-hour shift, having instead converted to 8, 10 or 12 hour shifts.

Additionally, we identified 18 of the LAFD's approximately 300 special duty positions that should be considered for conversion to civilian staff. Job descriptions and duties of these positions lend themselves to civilianizing and, again, would allow LAFD to redeploy these firefighting resources. Further, we identified several other special duty

assignments that should be reclassified from two-year rotational to permanent assignments. It is not possible to estimate any savings resulting from converting special duty assignments to civilians since LAFD would need to study the appropriate civil service classification and pay scale for each position. However, since these positions require specialized administrative skills and many of the firefighters who fill these jobs are on two-year rotational assignments, full-time permanent civilians could be hired already possessing the needed backgrounds and skills, and would be able to develop their expertise beyond the current two-year rotation.

Consequently, we make the following recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

We recommend that the Fire Commission:

- ◆ Plan an implementation strategy with the Mayor, City Council and key stakeholders to address civilianizing 62 firefighter call takers and 18 special duty positions within LAFD.

We also recommend that the Fire Commission direct the LAFD to:

- ◆ Begin the process of converting 62 sworn call takers to civilian call takers, including:
  - Conducting a time and task study with 2005 data to determine the number of civilian call takers needed based on hourly emergency call volumes, average call duration and required service levels.
  - Determining the preferred shift schedule (e.g. 8, 10 or 12 hours) to meet demands over a 24-hour period, and establish the number of call takers needed during each shift to meet peaks and valleys of call volumes.
  - Identifying and developing a training program for civilian emergency medical dispatchers with input from industry sources, comparable civilian fire department dispatch centers and LAPD.
  - Developing a sworn and civilian command structure that also outlines the roles and responsibilities of civilian call takers and sworn dispatch resource controllers.
- ◆ Consider redeploying 18 special duty firefighters to first-line fire suppression, rescue or emergency medical services.
- ◆ Work with the Personnel Department to identify comparable civilian civil service positions within the City's current job classifications based on the job descriptions and duties required.
- ◆ Review the two-year rotation policy on selected special duty assignments to determine if they should be converted to permanent sworn positions to address needed continuity and attainment of specialized skills that take more than two years to develop.
- ◆ Ensure that restricted duty firefighters are assigned to non-physically demanding positions within the department, thus allowing redeployment of regular duty firefighters to first-line positions.

## Introduction

---

The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) is a full-spectrum life safety agency providing services such as fire suppression and prevention, search and rescue, air operations, emergency medical transportation, and public education. Governed by a five-member civilian board of Fire Commissioners, the LAFD is headed by a Fire Chief, who directs nearly 3,400 firefighters and more than 300 non-sworn personnel. LAFD provides services through 103 neighborhood fire stations across the department's 471 square-mile jurisdiction, which covers a diverse topography including rocky chaparral and remote wild lands, dense urban and suburban areas, busy freeway and subway systems, airports, and a large ocean port. Ninety-six percent of the LAFD's \$445.5 million budget in fiscal year 2004-05 was spent on salaries and benefits for its employees.

LAFD carries out its public safety responsibilities and its mission as an "all risk life safety response provider" through the operations of five major bureaus, four headed by a Bureau Commander and one headed by a civilian Fire Administrator:

- ◆ *Bureau of Emergency Services*: LAFD's largest bureau with more than 3,100 uniformed members provide the front line fire-fighting services of controlling and extinguishing dangerous fires from 103 neighborhood fire stations. This bureau also provides emergency medical services to victims of trauma or sudden illness. The Fire Department's arson section is also part of this Bureau and handles investigations of major and suspicious fires.
- ◆ *Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety*: Headed by a Fire Marshal, this bureau is comprised of fire inspectors and fire prevention engineers who have the responsibility for the elimination of fire and life safety hazards in buildings, marine vessels, aircraft, and vehicles; the maintenance of fire protection equipment and systems; the regulation of storage, use, and handling of hazardous materials and hazardous substances; and enforcement of the basic building regulations of the State Fire Marshal. The bureau averages 600 construction plan checks per month and completes 400 new construction final inspections. The Bureau also lectures on fire prevention in schools, motion picture studios, department stores, and other business establishments.
- ◆ *Bureau of Support Services*: Provides the Department's general support functions, including logistics, maintenance, administration of the Fire Station Building Program, and communications. The Supply and Maintenance Division is responsible for procurement of supplies and maintenance of all apparatus and equipment. LAFD's fleet consists of 1,092 motorized vehicles, helicopters, and boats valued at more than \$246 million. The Dispatch Section is staffed by firefighters around-the-clock and is responsible for processing and prioritizing calls from the public. The Operations Control Division is responsible for tracking the status and location of approximately 600 emergency vehicles at all times and providing on-scene incident commanders with the logistical support needed to mitigate emergencies.
- ◆ *Bureau of Training and Risk Management*: This bureau is responsible for most human resource functions. Specifically, it develops and provides in-service tactical operations and human resource training programs to current employees, monitors

quality assurance of training programs, manages recruit services (including the Drill Tower training academy) and oversees risk management.

- ◆ ***Bureau of Administrative Services:*** Headed by the Fire Administrator, this bureau is responsible for providing the administrative staff functions for the entire LAFD. These are accomplished through five bureau sections: Management Services, Accounting Services, Employee Relations, Management Information Systems, and Personnel Services. Management Services is responsible for the preparation of the department's annual operating budget – the second largest non-proprietary department budget in the City.

During fiscal year 2004-2005, LAFD dispatched nearly 350,000 emergency calls, which include approximately 40,500 fire calls, 20,000 rescue calls, 3,700 hazardous materials calls, and nearly 285,000 emergency medical calls – up from almost 339,000 in fiscal year 2001-2002.

## **LAFD's Use of Sworn Firefighters in Non-Firefighting or Medical Emergency Roles**

LAFD commonly uses sworn firefighters in support or administrative roles in all of its five bureaus. Some of these positions are permanent assignments and others are special duty assignments in which the firefighter returns to his or her former position in a direct firefighting or medical emergency role after a two-year period. Throughout LAFD we identified about 300 positions where firefighters are used to support, oversee or administer various department activities.

In the majority of these assignments, the skills that a sworn firefighter brings to the support or administrative role within the LAFD are critical and necessary. Some of these activities include conducting fire investigations, training recruits on fire suppression and medical emergencies, coordinating the construction of fire stations and providing strategic planning to achieve the LAFD's mission.

However, other positions described in the report could be undertaken by civilian civil service employees efficiently and effectively – thus allowing the highly trained firefighters to be redeployed to more mission-critical fire suppression, rescue or medical emergency activities. Moreover, in some special duty assignments with a two-year rotation, insufficient time is allowed to develop the skills needed for the position before the assigned firefighter is returned to their former assignment. In those cases, civilian civil servants can build a knowledge base from a learning curve that is not interrupted in two years. The LAFD will benefit from the increased set of skills and experience civilians will bring.

Finally, the cost of civilian replacements will often be lower than their firefighter counterparts due to lower salary and retirement rates. The LAFD will also be able to offset the cost of hiring new civilian employees by redeploying the firefighters to line-duty rather than incurring the cost to hire and train new firefighter recruits.

## Scope and Methodology

The Los Angeles City Controller contracted with Sjoberg Evashenk Consulting, Inc. to conduct an audit of LAFD's use of sworn firefighters in non-firefighting activities, such as 9-1-1 dispatch, fire prevention, training and headquarter administration. The audit did not assess the LAFD's operational activities or readiness, such as its fire suppression, emergency medical transportation operations. The scope of the audit primarily focuses on the LAFD's current use of sworn firefighters in these various non-firefighting and medical emergency roles.

As part of our work during this audit, we reviewed numerous documents, including the following partial listing:

- ◆ Job descriptions and duties of all LAFD special duty and dispatch assignments
- ◆ Monthly dispatch and call statistics, and various OCD reports
- ◆ Carroll Buracker & Associates' 1995 report on OCD
- ◆ David M. Griffith & Associates' 1995 report on OCD
- ◆ Industry and professional association data on emergency dispatching, 9-1-1 and cell phones

We performed numerous interviews with key stakeholders and interested parties, including the following:

- ◆ LAFD bureau, division and battalion commanders
- ◆ LAPD communications division management
- ◆ LAFD and LAPD dispatchers and call takers
- ◆ AFLAC union president
- ◆ CAO analysts
- ◆ LA Fire and Police Retirement System officials
- ◆ LA City Employee's Retirement System officials
- ◆ LA City Controller Payroll Division officials

We conducted a benchmarking survey to determine prevailing fire dispatching practices in comparable fire departments. To conduct the survey, we selected the eight "benchmark partner" municipal fire departments that Carroll Buracker & Associates had identified for LAFD in its report. These eight fire departments are:

1. Atlanta Fire Department
2. Chicago Fire Department
3. Houston Fire Department
4. Los Angeles County Fire Department
5. Metropolitan Dade County, Florida Fire Department
6. Orange County Fire Department
7. Phoenix Fire Department
8. San Jose Fire Department

We also contacted several other benchmark fire departments to determine the extent of using civilian call takers in fire and medical emergency dispatching. These included seven other fire departments in Boston, Dallas, Denver, Oakland, Oklahoma City, Pittsburgh and Seattle.

We conducted this management audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We limited our review to those areas described in this Scope and Methodology Section.



## Chapter I – LAFD’s Dispatch Activities

---

LAFD’s Operations Control Division (OCD) within the Bureau of Support Services provides call taker and dispatch functions for the department. Led by an Assistant Chief who oversees three battalion commanders, nine captains and 75 firefighters, OCD handles about 72,000 calls per month. Most calls are 9-1-1 emergencies initially received by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and forwarded to OCD when they involve fire or medical emergencies.

Over ten years ago, after a consultant (DMG) engaged by the Mayor, CAO and CLA recommended civilianizing LAFD’s dispatch activities to save about \$4.1 million annually, the LAFD hired another consultant (Buracker) to study its Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) dispatch functions. In this second report, Buracker noted that while civilianizing the operations would save about \$660,000 per year, other factors needed to be considered, including an unreliable computer-aided dispatching system; the benefit of using permanently disabled and light duty firefighters in the dispatch center; a potential degradation of service quality; and, the development, cost and delivery of training civilian replacements. Based on these issues, Buracker concluded that LAFD should not change the staffing composition at that time. In 2006, LAFD’s dispatch operation continues to be staffed by sworn firefighters.

We analyzed and updated the key issues raised by the Buracker study and found that the most critical areas raised no longer exist 10 years later. Moreover, we assessed the current operations of the LAFD’s dispatch activities against industry standards and benchmarks, and the sources of the LAFD’s reticence to civilianizing. As a result, we believe that civilianizing 62 of the 75 dispatcher “call taker” positions is now viable and should save from \$2.3 to \$3.8 million annually; as well as provide other opportunities to improve LAFD’s dispatch activities.

Specifically, we found:

- ◆ Upgrades to software have improved the reliability of LAFD’s computer-aided dispatch system, reducing the system failures requiring the specialized firefighter skills Buracker identified in 1995.
- ◆ Of the eight “Benchmark Partners” identified by Buracker for comparison to LAFD, all eight have civilian call takers with a combination of sworn or civilian commanders. Most of these departments converted in the 1990s and cited cost savings as one advantage of civilianizing.
- ◆ Salary and benefit costs to replace 62 firefighter dispatchers on 24-hour shifts with the equivalent number of civilians needed on 8.5-hour shifts to provide coverage for LAFD’s call volume would be at least \$2.3 to \$3.8 million less each year after incurring costs of initial training.
- ◆ Los Angeles Police Department’s Communications Dispatch Center (the City’s first contact for 9-1-1 emergency calls) has a comprehensive training program for civilian Police Service Representatives (PSR) that could be built upon to train fire and

medical emergency call takers; or curricula from industry sources or from civilian fire department dispatch operations could be utilized.

- ◆ According to the Fire Chief, 80 percent of LAFD's incidents are non-fire related (e.g. medical emergencies), necessitating a new paradigm regarding firefighting skills. Ten years ago, many of Buracker's conclusions and LAFD's reluctance to civilianize were based on the benefit of having traditional firefighting skills in the OCD for fire incident command and control that is different under this new paradigm.
- ◆ About 23 of the OCD's dispatchers are on restricted duty with an average 11 years tenure with LAFD. If their positions are civilianized, we believe they can either remain with OCD to fill some of the 26 firefighter positions not civilianized or be reassigned to other non-physically demanding positions throughout the LAFD.

## **LAFD Fire and Medical Emergency Dispatch Operations**

LAFD's Operations Control Division (OCD) primarily utilizes space in the basement of City Hall East to house its emergency call taking and dispatch operations (9-1-1 and other land-line calls). The dispatch center includes a large room accommodating 20 to 25 emergency consoles, and facilities for housing, meals, recreation and training for the 13 leaders and 75 sworn dispatchers' use. OCD is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and follows the LAFD's normal platoon duty schedule (24-hour shifts). At all times, OCD is staffed with a battalion chief, three captains, and 25 firefighter dispatchers.

Emergency 9-1-1 calls are initially received by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and are forwarded to OCD. The 9-1-1 calls forwarded from LAPD represent about 80 percent of the emergency calls handled by LAFD, while the remaining emergency calls are received from seven digit LAFD telephone numbers. During 2005, OCD averaged about 72,000 calls per month, of which 43,000 were emergencies and 29,000 were non-emergency incoming and outgoing calls.

LAFD's requirements to apply to become a dispatcher include at least 4 ½ to 5 years of field experience as a firefighter or paramedic. LAFD firefighter dispatchers give/receive 2 and 3 year assignment commitments. Since all LAFD firefighters are EMTs or paramedic-certified, they possess medical skills to provide pre-arrival instructions during medical emergencies. We were told that newly assigned dispatchers receive a nine-week internal training course and complete 20 platoon shifts of on-the-job training before being assigned to regular dispatch duty.

Once trained, OCD's firefighters act as both call takers and dispatchers and they rotate between the positions from shift to shift. The "call taker" position answers the call, identifies the type of emergency, enters the information into the computer system, and provides pre-arrival instructions to the caller. A dispatcher is linked to an emergency call and "dispatches" the fire suppression or medical emergency unit(s) to the scene to respond to the call, and manages the location and status of all other units throughout the City to ensure adequate coverage with the quickest response time – OCD refers to these dispatchers as "resource controllers." During every 24-hour shift, OCD assigns three firefighters as resource controllers – one to handle metropolitan area fire dispatching, one to handle metropolitan area medical emergencies, and one to handle San Fernando Valley fire and medical emergencies. The remaining staff handle call taking duties and are available to assist resource controllers if needed.

Over the past 10 years, OCD commanders cite various improvements and upgrades in their dispatch operations. Specifically, they have:

- ◆ Upgraded the Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system;
- ◆ Implemented Digitized Voice System (DVS), which increases dispatch efficiency/speed; and,
- ◆ Implemented the Magna-Sync system (digital voice recording), which allows for better and more immediate post incident analysis.

## **LAFD Strongly Supports Using Firefighters as Dispatchers**

LAFD strongly believes that sworn firefighter dispatchers are critical to the effectiveness of handling fire and/or medical emergencies it receives because their firefighting experience allows them to:

- ◆ Add or remove equipment and services in anticipation of the incident's needs, prior to an Incident Commander's arrival on the scene;
- ◆ Provide Incident Commanders in the field with equipment and tactical suggestions to improve the situation;
- ◆ Provide a second perspective on the incident as well as a Citywide point-of-view for large emergencies or disasters;
- ◆ Transfer quickly from being call takers to dispatchers if the volume of incidents or severity of the emergency overloads the assigned resource controller; and,
- ◆ Have an expandable staff immediately available to respond to emergencies and disasters and an increased volume of calls because OCD operates on a platoon duty schedule

Moreover, LAFD asserts that new challenges support the need for sworn firefighters in the OCD dispatch operations. These new challenges include an increased threat of terrorism, which LAFD notes requires the level of skill and training of its firefighters to perform all of its activities, including dispatch. Also, they believe with the City's changing population demographics, more people rely on the emergency services provided by LAFD as a primary source of care, which creates a demand for more highly trained call takers to assess the cause(s) of the problem and provide "pre-arrival instructions."

Finally, LAFD is concerned over the growing number of cell phones used to make 9-1-1 emergency calls. LAFD contends wireless calls have a greater level of complexity (i.e. the caller's address isn't automatically given by computer system) and require call takers with "knowledge of the city" and experience to handle different situations, thus necessitating the skills of sworn staff.

## **Achieving Benefits While Addressing LAFD's Concerns**

LAFD's concerns expressed regarding civilianizing its dispatch activities generally fall within the following five areas:

- ◆ Assisting incident commanders with equipment and tactical advice or insights into the City's geography, both pre- and post-arrival;
- ◆ Flexibility afforded by having cross-trained dispatchers available on a 24-hour basis to provide backup;
- ◆ Complications arising from increased use of cell phone 9-1-1 emergency calls;
- ◆ Recent additional security threats faced by the City; and,
- ◆ A resident population that demands more "pre-arrival instructions" because of reliance on LAFD's emergency medical services.

We address each of these concerns in the following sections.

### *Assisting Incident Commanders*

Providing equipment or tactical advice to incident commanders en route to or on-scene at a fire is primarily undertaken by the OCD's three resource controllers and not call takers on each shift. Moreover, about 80 percent of emergency calls are medical-related and not calls for fire suppression services. So long as a sufficient number of resource controllers (trained firefighters) are available to assist on the 20 percent fire-related calls, this issue is minimized. Moreover, emergency medical resource controllers would be available to dispatch paramedics as needed. Nevertheless, to address this need we recommend civilianizing only 62 of LAFD's 75 firefighter dispatchers, which leaves 13 firefighters and all 13 command staff to assist incident commanders.

### *Cross-Trained Dispatchers*

Because of LAFD's 24-hour platoon duty format, having 25 cross-trained firefighter dispatchers available at all hours of the day for an extraordinary emergency clearly provides greater flexibility than using a call-back option wherein 8, 10 or 12 hour shift workers are called into work early or retained on overtime after their shift ends. However, this situation is driven by the assignment of dispatchers by platoon duty versus regular shifts, and not by whether the dispatcher is a firefighter or a civilian (i.e. civilians could be assigned to 24-hour platoon duty).

Since none of LAFD's benchmark partner municipal fire departments utilize a 24-hour shift any longer, the added flexibility must not been seen as necessary in these other locales. Additionally, LAPD and similar 9-1-1 emergency centers call in off-duty staff and/or extend shifts when such emergencies arise. Moreover, since the number of dispatchers working during a given shift is based on historic **peak** call volumes, the need for the type of backup LAFD refers to would occur infrequently.

### *Complications from 9-1-1 Emergency Cell Phone Calls*

Recent advances in cell phone technology and mandates from the Federal Communications Commission have significantly reduced or eliminated the complications LAFD raises concerning the increased use of cell phones for 9-1-1 emergency calls.

Although the California Highway Patrol (CHP) has begun to cease taking cell phone calls emanating from non-highway cell towers, the LAPD Communication Centers is assuming the responsibility of answering the cell calls the CHP used to receive.

Operating an Enhanced 9-1-1 function, LAPD's dispatchers now employ Mapstar, a mapping system that triangulates cell phone calls to identify the caller's location within acceptable tolerances. Although LAFD does not have Mapstar, LAPD will share the caller's location to assist fire or medical emergency dispatching. According to the LAPD, the actual volume of cell calls received by the LAFD will not materially differ as a result of CHP divesting itself of non-highway related 9-1-1 cell calls.

### ***Additional Threats Faced by the City***

There is no doubt that since 9/11, first responders throughout the country are facing new threats and challenges. However, these issues are not unique to the LAFD – similar challenges face other organizations within the Los Angeles Basin, such as the Los Angeles County Fire Department, Los Angeles Police Department, and Orange County Fire Authority just to name a few. All of these entities currently use civilian dispatchers. Furthermore, other major cities in the United States like New York, Chicago, Dallas and Miami face similar threats with civilian dispatchers.

### ***Use of LAFD Emergency Medical Services***

As mentioned previously, approximately 80 percent of LAFD's calls relate to medical emergencies. Consequently, LAFD's call takers must determine the type of medical emergency being reported, contact an LAFD paramedic unit and provide the caller with "pre-arrival instructions" to address the injury or medical event. Pre-arrival instructions are a scripted, medically-approved set of directions for a wide variety of medical emergencies that can aid a caller and save lives prior to the arrival of the paramedic unit. A set of cards describing the various medical emergencies resides on each console in LAFD's dispatch center.

The instructions cover emergencies from what to do during a heart attack or serious bleeding, to child birth or poisoning. However, there is a limit on what can be provided over the telephone no matter the dispatcher's expertise, since the instructions must be acted upon by a caller who may be stressed, agitated or simply unable to perform the pre-arrival protocols. For this the reason, the pre-arrival instructions are medically-approved in advance to provide the best directions possible while limiting the liability exposure to the fire department from the medical advice given. Consequently, an adequately trained civilian call taker (certified as an Emergency Medical Dispatcher) could provide these services in LAFD's dispatch center, just as they do in fire department dispatch operations throughout the nation.

The expanded utilization of LAFD's medical emergency services by a diverse population must be continually monitored to assure that sufficient call taker resources are available to answer the calls. This should be done regardless of whether the call taker is a sworn firefighter or a civilian.

## **Past Studies Have Addressed Civilianizing LAFD's Dispatch Operations**

In the mid-1990s, the firm of David M. Griffith and Associates (DMG) was hired by the Mayor's Office, CAO and CLA to address various opportunities to generate savings for the City's general fund. In April 1995, DMG issued its report which included an analysis

of LAFD's fire dispatch staffing. After reviewing sworn firefighter staffing levels, LAFD call volumes and 13 "panel" cities (comparatively-sized fire departments), DMG concluded that LAFD should civilianize its "call taker" positions and retain its sworn dispatchers. According to DMG, implementing this recommendation would have generated a \$4.1 million annual savings.

In response, LAFD hired the firm of Carroll Buracker and Associates (Buracker) to conduct a review and benchmark study of the LAFD's fire and EMS dispatch staffing. In its study, Buracker selected eight metropolitan fire departments throughout the country and identified them as "benchmark partners" with LAFD. In 1995, these eight fire departments<sup>2</sup> had a mix of sworn or civilian dispatchers (or a combination of both) and utilized differing work shifts (e.g., 8, 10, 12 or 24-hour shifts). Buracker also attempted, but was unable, to calculate a preferred staffing level for LAFD, although it did recommend increasing the hours per shift that the firefighter dispatchers spent at the telephone consoles.

In November 1995, Buracker issued its report and concluded that while civilianizing LAFD's dispatch would save about \$660,000 per year, for various reasons, sworn firefighters should be retained "at this time". It cited the following problems keeping them from recommending a civilianized workforce:

- ♦ The unreliable Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system that was out of service more than 100 times during 1994, necessitating staff-intensive manual operations on 14 occasions.
- ♦ The significant early retirement and workers' compensation costs that would be incurred for the 20 restricted duty firefighter dispatchers who would be out-placed due to civilianizing.
- ♦ The potential degradation of emergency service delivery, especially during transition to civilian dispatchers.
- ♦ The cost and time to develop and deliver a program to train civilians to replace firefighter dispatchers.

Buracker provided an alternative set of recommendations in the event that the City made substantial improvements regarding automation, reassigned restricted duty firefighters rather than incurring substantial early retirement costs, and understood the potential that degraded service levels (especially during transition) could occur. In those circumstances, Buracker suggested that the City consider civilianization within the OCD "by starting with the call taker function and evaluating that part of the program." Brubacker also suggested implementing a 12-hour shift versus OCD's 24-hour A-B-C platoon duty; creating a rank structure combining sworn and civilian staff; and, developing a curriculum for a civilian dispatcher training program.

---

<sup>2</sup> Fire departments in Atlanta, Chicago, Metro Dade County, Phoenix, Orange County, Los Angeles County, Houston and San Jose

## Conditions Have Changed Since Buracker's 1995 Report

A number of the key areas of concern expressed by Buracker in 1995 that caused them to withhold a recommendation to civilianize OCD's dispatch operations "at this time" have changed during the ensuing 10 years. These changes include:

- ◆ Updated Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system: As described earlier, LAFD told us that they have updated the CAD system and made other system enhancements. These updates directly address Buracker's primary concern regarding the old system's poor reliability at the time of its 1995 study.
- ◆ Retirement costs of replacing Restricted Duty firefighter dispatchers: In 1995, Buracker was told by LAFD that there were "very few non-OCD assignments available to restricted duty firefighters in the LAFD." Consequently, Buracker calculated early retirement and workers' compensation costs (estimated to be about \$465,000 annually) as a result of civilianizing the 20 restricted duty firefighter dispatchers, because they believed these restricted duty firefighters had no other work options within LAFD.

As described in Chapter II, we identified over 300 restricted duty assignments in other LAFD bureaus, including many in the Bureau of Emergency Services and Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety. Consequently, incurring significant costs in "forced retirements" is not a necessary outcome of civilianizing dispatch activities. (We more fully discuss the reassignment of restricted duty firefighters on Page 22 of this report.)

- ◆ Degradation of service due to civilian dispatchers: Although the Buracker report raises the specter of reduced quality of service after civilianizing dispatch operations, and specifically highlights lowered service during the period of transitioning from firefighters to civilians, we found no empirical evidence to support this contention among LAFD's eight "benchmark partner" municipal fire departments. In fact, by 2006, all eight of these fire departments have transitioned to civilian call takers with a mix of sworn and/or civilians as commanders.
- ◆ Civilian Training Costs: Buracker estimated that training civilian dispatchers could take up to two years and cost more than a \$1 million per class of 20 trainees, although it provides no evidence supporting its estimate.

According to LAFD, its current training for firefighter dispatchers entails a nine-week classroom period followed by on-the-job training for 20 platoon duty shifts. This training is in addition to the 17-week Drill Tower training academy and one-year probation period each dispatcher must complete prior to applying to OCD.

For comparison, LAPD civilian call taker (PSR) training takes about a year to complete, and includes a three-week Police Officer Standards Training (POST) course, followed by nine weeks of telephone operator and auxiliary telephone operator classroom training. PSRs are then given floor training (OJT) in which each PSR has up to 20 weeks to qualify. After reaching that level, PSRs then take an additional 4 weeks of classroom training as emergency board operators, and are given up to nine weeks of OJT to qualify.

Moreover, since civilian call takers have become common in fire departments throughout the country, including each of LAFD's benchmark partners, Emergency Medical Dispatcher training curricula are widely available for LAFD to build upon. When LAFD's current dispatcher training costs (Drill Tower and dispatcher training) are compared to a one-year civilian call taker training program, the civilian training costs should be less.

As a result, we believe these changes make civilianizing the firefighter call taker activities a viable approach in 2006.

## **A Mix of Civilian Call Takers and Sworn Dispatchers Generates Benefits**

OCD has a total of 88 sworn firefighters operating its emergency dispatch operations. Seventy-five hold the rank of Firefighter III, nine are captains, three are battalion commanders and one is an assistant chief. These sworn members perform call taker (directly answering emergency phone calls) and resource controller assignments, or supervise the staff performing those duties. Call takers directly answer the emergency 9-1-1 calls forwarded from LAPD and other emergency calls received on LAFD telephone numbers at 20 to 25 emergency telephone consoles. During each shift, three resource controllers are tasked with dispatching the appropriate LAFD equipment and resources, and assisting incident commanders en route to, and on-site at an emergency location. The resource controllers can also draw upon the other dispatchers who are cross-trained to provide backup assistance if they are unable to control an emergency alone.

As we reviewed the DMG and Buracker reports and evaluated current fire dispatch activities and operations within LAFD and in fire departments throughout the nation, we concluded that civilianizing **62 call taker positions** is now viable in 2006. This alternative staffing model generates several benefits to the LAFD and the City of Los Angeles. Namely, it allows for the redeployment of 62 skilled firefighters to front-line firefighting, rescue and emergency medical operations and can save at least \$2.3 to \$3.8 million annually, less initial training costs – while retaining 26 senior-level sworn firefighters to provide important resource controller, dispatch and incident control expertise.

As a point of reference, converting firefighter call taking functions to civilians also meets Buracker's recommendation in 1995 once system problems and other issues were resolved. Further, such conversions have been successfully implemented in all eight of LAFD's benchmark partner municipal fire departments.

In developing our cost savings estimate of civilianizing these 62 positions, we calculated the actual personal services costs that LAFD incurred during 2005 for 62 Firefighter IIIs serving as OCD dispatchers, and added retirement and other benefits. We then determined the equivalent number of civilians needed on an 8.5-hour shift basis to compare to the OCD's 24-hour platoon duty on-call coverage. To estimate the cost of civilian employees, we used salary, retirement and other benefit rates paid to LAPD's Police Service Representatives who work 8.5 hours per day, five days per week, since the City has already established position and job classifications for these emergency call taker responsibilities.



## **Determining Staffing Levels and Shift Schedules for an Emergency Dispatch Operation**

According to the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), the optimal number of call takers needed to respond to emergency calls cannot be determined by a standardized mathematical formula. The best shift staffing (e.g. 8, 10 or 12 hour shifts) and number of call takers needed can only be determined with a time and task study within each dispatch center. Consequently, we did not determine whether the LAFD's current 24-hour platoon duty with 25 dispatchers (plus supervisors and command staff) available within each platoon comprises the optimal or most efficient configuration of staffing and shift type to accomplish LAFD's performance goals.

However, shifts of 8, 10 or 12 hours during a given 24-hour day do afford a dispatch center the opportunity to assign only the necessary or appropriate number of call takers required to meet the volume of activity projected based on historic call volumes and expected peak periods during selected groups of hours each day. As described below, LAFD employs such a shift deployment schedule wherein more firefighter call takers are assigned to answer emergency calls during certain hourly periods of the day than others. With LAFD's 24-hour platoon duty model, however, all 25 firefighters are "on duty" for the entire 24-hour shift, while they are only assigned to cover emergency calls from 10 to 13 hours of that time.

We obtained hourly emergency call volume and call duration data from OCD that covered a two-week period from February 22, 2006 to March 6, 2006. From this brief 14-day period of time, we determined that LAFD handled from 11 to 101 emergency calls per hour (averaging 54), with an average call duration of two minutes per call. The lowest call volume occurred between midnight and 7:00 a.m. with the highest volumes from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. during the workweek. We found that call activity was more equally spread out during the weekends.

Applying the "queuing theory" advocated by the NENA to determine minimum call taker staffing reveals that even using LAFD's peak hourly call volume of 101 calls with a two-minute call duration requires only seven call takers, with just four call takers to handle its average call volume of 54 per hour. Although this data covers far too short a time period to draw absolute conclusions, it does suggest the need for LAFD to undertake a time and task study to validate its call taker staffing levels and deployment.

OCD officials told us it currently assigns its 25 dispatchers over a 24-hour period to address historic emergency call volume fluctuations as follows:

Hour of the Day	Number of Dispatchers Deployed
8 am to 9 pm	12 to 13 dispatchers
9 pm to 10 pm	10 to 11 dispatchers
10 pm to 1 am	9 dispatchers
1 am to 4 am	7 to 8 dispatchers
4 am to 8 am	6 to 7 dispatchers

If the LAFD holds to its current staffing deployment schedule described above, it means that the average dispatcher spends about 10.36 hours during each 24-hour shift assigned to a telephone console. We derived this number by weighting the total number of hours within each time period by the number of dispatchers assigned to each block of hours. The result was divided by the 25 firefighter dispatchers working each platoon shift to obtain an average per dispatcher. The remaining 13 ½ hours is spent sleeping, eating, and on recreational/personal activities.

However, an OCD Battalion Commander told us that the average time spent at the consoles is actually 13 hours per dispatcher over a 24-hour period, although we could not confirm his estimate.

### **Savings Generated by Civilianizing 62 Call Taker Positions**

We based the savings generated from civilianizing 62 call taker positions on the following key workload factors.

#### ***Workload Statistics***

- ◆ OCD's firefighter dispatchers spend an average of 10.36 to 13 hours per 24-hour shift assigned to answer emergency calls (our calculation based on dispatcher deployment is 10.36 hours and OCD's estimate is 13 hours).
- ◆ OCD completes 365 shifts of 24-hours each over the year. On the three-platoon basis, each shift is comprised of 25 on-duty firefighter dispatchers (of the total of 75 firefighter dispatchers within OCD).
- ◆ At 10.36 to 13 hours answering emergency calls per 24-hour shift, all of OCD's call takers provide from 94,535 hours to 118,625 hours of emergency call coverage per year. ( $365 \times 25$  staff per shift = 9,125; therefore,  $9,125 \times 10.36$  hours = 94,535 hours/yr; or  $9,125 \times 13$  hour = 118,625 hours/yr.)
- ◆ Since only 82.67 percent of OCD's 75 ( $62 \div 75 = 82.67\%$ ) firefighter dispatchers are proposed for civilianizing, the annual hours of emergency call coverage is reduced to 78,152 hours per year to 98,067 hours per year, depending on whether the 10.36 or 13 hour coverage estimate is used ( $94,535 \times .8267 = 78,152$ ; and  $118,625 \times .8267 = 98,067$ .)

Consequently, civilian call takers would have to provide from **78,152 to 98,067 hours of emergency call coverage** to match OCD's current staffing and shift model. To determine how many civilian call takers would be needed to provide this level of coverage, we based our civilian staffing analysis on the LAPD's Public Service Representatives (PSR). LAPD utilizes the following staffing and shift model for its civilian PSR emergency call takers at its 9-1-1 communication centers.

#### ***Civilian Staffing Statistics***

- ◆ According to LAPD, its civilian PSRs work an 8.5 hour shift; however, with meals and breaks, they actually spend only 7 hours per shift directly answering emergency calls.
- ◆ LAPD utilizes three 8.5 hour shifts per day – A.M., Day and P.M. Each PSR works five shifts per week.

- ♦ If a PSR worked without vacation, sick leave or other time off, they would generate 2,210 work hours per year (8.5 hours x 5 days/week x 52 weeks/year = 2,210).
- ♦ Of the 2,210 hours, only 1,870 hours would be spent actually answering emergency calls (7 hours x 5 days/week x 52 weeks/year = 1,870).
- ♦ Therefore, to provide 78,161 hours per year of emergency phone coverage, LAFD would need to hire 42 civilians (78,161 ÷ 1,870 = 41.8 staff). Similarly, to provide 98,067 hours per year of emergency phone coverage, LAFD would need to hire 52 civilians (98,067 ÷ 1,870 = 52.4 staff).

To address civilian time off, the National Emergency Number Association cites studies that each required call taker position should be multiplied by 1.7 to address vacation, sick leave and other time off. However, LAPD appears to use a non-industry standard factor of 2.019 for vacation, sick leave and other time-off relief. Therefore, to account for civilian time off, LAFD would need to hire from 84 to 106 civilian call takers (41.8 positions x 2.019 = 84.4 or 52.4 positions x 2.019 = 105.8) using LAPD's 2.019 relief factor ratio. Based on the LAFD's workload statistics and comparative LAPD civilian staffing requirements, we calculate that LAFD would need from **84 to 106 civilian call takers** to replace the annual emergency call coverage currently provided by OCD's 62 firefighter call takers using only the LAPD's relief factor ratio.

#### ***Cost Savings from Hiring Civilian Call Takers:***

To calculate the cost savings generated by civilianizing 62 call taker positions, we gathered the following salary, retirement and benefit data for OCD's Firefighter III dispatchers and related salary, retirement and benefit data for civilian PSRs within the LAPD.

- ♦ During 2005, the actual salary, bonuses and overtime paid by LAFD for its Firefighter III call takers averaged \$121,581 per firefighter before adding benefits.
- ♦ After adding 17.28 percent for retirement<sup>3</sup> and \$8,964 for other benefits,<sup>4</sup> the average annual cost of a Firefighter III dispatcher is \$151,554 per year.
- ♦ The budgeted average PSR II and PSR III salaries within LAPD is \$52,854 per PSR.<sup>5</sup>
- ♦ After adding 12.96 percent for retirement<sup>6</sup> and \$7,452 for other benefits,<sup>7</sup> the average annual cost for an equivalent civilian dispatcher is \$67,156 per year.

#### **Savings Based on 84 Civilians for 62 Firefighter Positions**

Sworn versus Civilian	Annual Wages Including Retirement and Other Benefits	# of Positions	Total Cost
LAFD Sworn	\$151,554	62	\$9,396,348
Civilians (84)	\$67,156	84	(\$5,641,104)
<b>Savings</b>			<b>\$3,755,244</b>

<sup>3</sup> City's share of Fire and Police Retirement System costs at 2005.

<sup>4</sup> CAO's estimated cost of firefighter benefits paid by City.

<sup>5</sup> City of Los Angeles Salary Budget Document for 2005.

<sup>6</sup> City's share of LACERS' retirement costs at 2005.

<sup>7</sup> CAO's estimated costs of non-sworn civil service benefits.

### **Savings Based on 106 Civilians for 62 Firefighter Positions**

Sworn versus Civilian	Annual Wages Including Retirement and Other Benefits	# of Positions	Total Cost
LAFD Sworn	\$151,554	62	\$9,396,348
Civilians (106)	\$67,156	106	\$7,118,536
<b>Savings</b>			<b>\$2,277,812</b>

Therefore, we believe LAFD can save a minimum of **\$2.3 million to \$3.8 million annually** by civilianizing 62 of its firefighter dispatch positions, after incurring initial training costs. Moreover, if LAFD is able to manage its civilian relief schedule to the industry standard ratio of 1.7 to 1, instead of LAPD's 2.019 ratio, the department would be able to generate savings approaching \$3.4 to \$4.6 million annually. Finally, a workload time and task study should be conducted to determine the appropriate number of call takers to cover LAFD's call volume based on the results of our limited test described above.

### **Utilizing Restricted Duty Firefighters**

As of October 2005, the OCD had 23 firefighters working as call taker/dispatchers who were on restricted duty. Clearly, an injured firefighter who has a temporary or permanent disability should be placed in a position appropriate for their condition with the approval of medical staff. Utilizing restricted duty firefighters in non-physically demanding positions benefits the department and the firefighter alike, and should continue to be encouraged.

We are mindful of these benefits and believe the goal of fully utilizing restricted duty employees can be maintained while civilianizing 62 of OCD's call taker positions. First, our proposal does not call for civilianizing all 75 firefighter dispatcher positions; consequently, 13 Firefighter IIIs remain in OCD. Since the 23 restricted duty dispatchers are cross-trained in call taking and dispatching, these remaining positions could be staffed by 13 of OCD's restricted duty firefighters.

Second, as discussed in Chapter II of the report, we identified 300 Special Duty assignments in LAFD's five bureaus and Headquarter administration that provide support and administrative functions. About 83 of these positions are currently staffed by restricted duty firefighters – leaving nearly 200 of the 300 Special Duty positions available for restricted duty firefighters even after converting the 18 positions we identified for civilianization in Chapter II of the report. Therefore, LAFD has numerous opportunities to place its restricted duty firefighter dispatchers who do not remain within OCD.

## Chapter II – Special Duty Assignments

---

According to the LAFD, special duty assignments are often two-year rotations within the LAFD organization that require the specialized skills of uniformed employees in a variety of areas outside of the fire station platoon duty environment. While special duty positions can be assigned to sworn members at any level – the majority of these positions are at the Firefighter III and Inspector levels and to a lesser extent, captain and chief levels. Special duty assignments are located in LAFD's administrative offices at City Hall East, fire prevention field offices and training centers, and include assignments such as LAFD planning, discipline, fire inspections, disaster preparedness and recruit training. There are also other administrative-type special duty assignments such as workers compensation, risk management, and medical liaison. We found that most special duty assignments within the LAFD require the specialized skills of trained firefighters. However, certain positions we identified where firefighting skills and experience are not required could be converted to civilian staff.

After an initial review to determine if any special duty assignments could be performed by non-sworn civilian employees, we found that all special duty assignments within the Bureau of Emergency Services (25 positions) and the Bureau of Fire Prevention (169 positions), should remain as sworn firefighters since the duties and activities undertaken by these special duty assignees clearly required firefighting, rescue or emergency medical skills. With these two bureaus excluded, we were left with a total of 128 special duty assignments to assess whether non-sworn civilian staff could efficiently and effectively conduct the duties required of the position – thus allowing LAFD to redeploy these trained firefighters to front-line fire suppression, rescue or medical emergency duties.

As a result of our review of the job tasks and descriptions for each position, we believe that 18 of the 128 special duty assignments can be more efficiently and effectively conducted by non-sworn civilian employees. Specifically, we identified the following positions:

- ♦ **Medical Liaison Officers:** Replace three special duty captains with three trained civilians.
- ♦ **Wellness Unit Officer:** Replace a special duty captain with a trained civilian.
- ♦ **Risk Management Officers:** Replace one special duty battalion commander and one special duty captain with two trained civilians (supervisor and one worker).
- ♦ **Workers Compensation Officers:** Replace two special duty captains with two trained civilians.
- ♦ **Quality Control Dispatch Officers:** Replace six special duty paramedic firefighters (one captain and five firefighters) with trained civilian paramedics.
- ♦ **Community Relations Officer:** Replace one special duty captain with a trained civilian employee.
- ♦ **Operations Executive Officer:** Replace a special duty disciplinary battalion commander with a trained supervisory investigator.

- ♦ **Advocate Officers:** Replace two special duty captains with trained investigators.

## **Most Special Duty Assignments Require Firefighter Skills**

Our analysis of job descriptions and duties of approximately 300 special duty assignments within LAFD revealed that most require the unique skills and training of a seasoned firefighter. This is particularly true in the Bureau of Emergency Services and the Bureau of Fire Prevention where 194 special duty assignments are utilized.

### **Bureau of Emergency Services**

The Bureau of Emergency Services (BES), LAFD's largest bureau with more than 3,100 uniformed members, provides front-line firefighting and emergency medical services. BES has the following 25 special duty positions, which are generally two-year rotating assignments:

- ♦ *Fire Service Liaison Officer:* This sworn member authors technical memos and responses, is part of BES's command staff at large emergency incidents, and manages the fire service transfer system (members that operate fire trucks, apparatus, etc).
- ♦ *EMS Liaison Officer:* This sworn member oversees the EMS transfer system (members that operate ambulances), manages paramedic staffing levels, reviews incident reports, and serves on the BES's command staff at large emergency incidents.
- ♦ *Assistant Bureau Commander:* This sworn member directly reports to the Bureau Commander and is responsible for the day to day management and oversight of the BES and acts as the Bureau Commander in his absence.
- ♦ *Special Operations Division:* Nineteen sworn members within this division are responsible for Arson Investigations, Air Operations, Homeland Security, Disaster Preparedness, and Urban Search and Rescue. The special duty positions in the Special Operations Division are filled with members from BES and require the skills and experience of sworn members as these positions are technical in nature and are not administrative positions. In addition, the Disaster Preparedness unit includes nine sworn firefighters on restricted duty.
- ♦ *EMS Section:* Three firefighters in this section oversee the delivery of EMS services, represent the BES on committees on EMS delivery, prepare technical reports and research, and assign work to the LAFD's 48 EMS captains.

We believe that all 25 special duty assignments within the BES should remain sworn firefighters.

### **Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety**

The Bureau of Fire Prevention and Public Safety (Fire Prevention Bureau), headed by the Fire Marshal and Assistant Fire Marshal, is comprised of fire captains, fire inspectors and

fire prevention engineers who are also peace officers. The Fire Prevention Bureau has 169 special duty positions, all of which are permanent positions and do not rotate. In addition, members promote into the Fire Prevention Bureau after accumulating at least 4 years with LAFD and passing a very technical fire inspector examination. The Fire Prevention Bureau averages 600 construction plan checks per month and completes 400 new construction final inspections, among other duties.

Finally, the Fire Prevention Bureau has approximately 72 members who are on restricted duty. According to the Fire Marshal, the Fire Prevention Bureau is a good fit for restricted duty personnel because the position requires technical knowledge but does not require the physical demands that the Bureau of Emergency Services requires.

We believe that all 169 special duty positions within the Fire Prevention Bureau should remain sworn firefighters.

## **Some Special Duty Assignments Could be Civilianized**

After concluding that the special duty assignments within the BES and Fire Prevention Bureau should remain sworn firefighters, we analyzed the job descriptions and duties of the 128 special duty assignments located in the LAFD's remaining three bureaus – Bureau of Support Services, Bureau of Administrative Services, and Bureau of Training and Risk Management – and within Headquarter's administration. Our review of the special duty assignments within these bureaus identified 18 positions that could be civilianized.

### **Bureau of Support Services**

The LAFD's Operations Control Division that operates the Dispatch Center is within the Bureau of Support Services and is the subject of Chapter I of the report. In addition to dispatch operations, the Bureau of Support Services also provides LAFD's general support functions, including logistics, maintenance, and administration of the Fire Station Building Program, and has 21 special duty positions. These positions are generally two-year rotating assignments.

- ◆ *Fire Facilities Division:* Eight sworn firefighters coordinate LAFD's Bond Construction (Prop F) and Capital Improvement Programs (Prop Q) and coordinate the maintenance and repairs of local fire stations. According to Project Managers within the Department of Public Work's Bureau of Engineering (BOE), the experiences the sworn members that work in this division bring to the projects are critical because the BOE is not knowledgeable of LAFD's operational needs. It appears reasonable that functions in the Fire Facilities Division be handled by firefighters since the BOE considers the sworn members' expertise to be critical. However, LAFD should consider converting some of these positions to permanent sworn staff to partially alleviate the continuity issues generated by continually rotating staff through these positions as raised by the BOE during our interviews.
- ◆ *Volunteer Coordination Unit:* A fire captain coordinates LAFD's extensive volunteer program comprised of four units: General Volunteers, Support Services Volunteers, Auxiliary Communication Service (ACS) Volunteers, and Explorer Scouts. It appears reasonable that coordination of volunteers is handled by a sworn member as

this position acts as the LAFD's liaison with civilian volunteers that lack technical experience and knowledge.

- ♦ *Supply and Maintenance Division:* An Assistant Chief acts as the Assistant Bureau Commander and oversees this division which is primarily made up of civilian maintenance workers and mechanics. Six sworn members work in the supply and engineering section overseen by a Battalion Chief. This section provides medical supplies, equipment engineering, and rescue maintenance units, including reviewing and approving requests for supplies and equipment that come from all bureaus of this department.

According to the Bureau Commander, sworn members are necessary in this section because they must understand the fire department's needs and understand how to use the fire department's requisition system; however, he acknowledged that a civilian could learn the requisition system with enough time and training.

### **Opportunities to Civilianize Bureau of Support Services Positions**

Beyond the potential of civilianizing call takers within the Bureau of Support Service's Operations Control Division discussed in Chapter I of the report, we did not identify any special duty positions within the bureau for possible civilianizing.

Within the Fire Facilities Division, we did identify a condition where LAFD should rethink its two-year rotation policy to assure continuity of specialized skills related to fire station construction. Furthermore, the Supply and Engineering Section commander acknowledged that with sufficient training in the LAFD's requisition process, civilians may be able to undertake the supply requisition responsibilities. Since evaluating the complexity of LAFD's requisition system was not within the scope of this audit, we did not include these positions in our recommendations to civilianize.

### **Bureau of Administrative Services**

Headed by a civilian Fire Administrator, the Bureau of Administrative Services (BAS) is responsible for providing the administrative staff functions for the entire LAFD. These are accomplished through five sections: Management Services, Accounting Services, Employee Relations, Management Information Systems, and Personnel Services. The vast majority of employees in BAS are civilian employees, but it does have the following five special duty positions, which are generally two-year rotating assignments:

- ♦ *Medical Liaison Unit:* This unit assists members who have sustained duty-related injury by coordinating with the member, third-party insurance adjuster, and the Workers Compensation Division in the Bureau of Training and Risk Management. This unit arranges and follows up on care, tracks all members injured on duty time and coordinates the return to work program. According to the Personnel Director, LAPD has completely civilianized this section in its department and she believes that LAFD should as well. The Fire Administrator was not as confident that it should be civilianized as some members just want to talk to sworn members about injury related case information. The special duty captain that supervises this unit indicated that at this time, 50 percent of the calls this unit receives could be handled by civilian clerical staff and even more if they were appropriately trained. In addition, this unit includes two sworn firefighters on restricted duty.



- ♦ *Wellness Section:* This section is directed by a civilian medical doctor and has one special duty captain. It oversees the new medical program started by LAFD in November 2005, and coordinates comprehensive medical exams for a randomly chosen group of firefighters working in the BES. This special duty captain also assists BES in locating members to work overtime to cover shifts of members taking exams. If a problem is found during the exams, the Medical Liaison unit takes over. The Fire Administrator and Personnel Director indicated that this position should be civilianized.
- ♦ *Employee Relations Officer:* This special duty Battalion Chief is responsible for representing LAFD in all matters relating to employer/employee relations, including representing the department with employee organizations, including developing the labor union memoranda of understanding (MOU). The nature of this position appears to justify the use of a sworn employee since the vast majority of LAFD employees represented by this officer are sworn employees. This position also acts as a liaison between the CAO and City Attorney with regard to employee relations issues and maintains the employee grievance procedures (for violations of sections of the MOU).

However, because this is a two-year rotating position, members in this assignment would, at most, be part of only one MOU negotiation cycle since labor contracts are renegotiated every three years. Thus, under the current two-year rotation, there is no institutional knowledge retained within LAFD regarding past MOU agreements or negotiations, and no effective way to transfer this experience and knowledge to the next sworn member. Consequently, rotations render the CAO's office in a position of having to constantly train newcomers to the assignment.

### **Opportunities to Civilianize Bureau of Administrative Services Positions**

Of BAS's special duty assignments described above, we have identified four assignments that can be more effectively and efficiently fulfilled using permanent civilian staff. Specifically, we believe the Medical Liaison unit's activities are generally administrative in nature and do not require the skills possessed by its three trained firefighters. Additionally, we recommend replacing the Wellness Unit Officer with a civilian as suggested by the Fire Administrator.

Further, we believe that the Employee Relations Officer requires vast institutional knowledge and on-the-job experience with an associated learning curve that is lost under the current special duty rotational model. Therefore, we suggest that LAFD convert this position from a rotating special duty assignment to a sworn permanent position with the appropriate training and experience to manage LAFD's employee relations activities.

### **Bureau of Training and Risk Management**

Bureau of Training and Risk Management (Training Bureau) provides and develops in-service tactical operations and human resource training programs to current employees, monitors quality assurance of training programs, manages recruit services, including the Drill Tower training academy, and oversees risk management. The Training Bureau has 91 special duty positions, which are generally two-year rotating positions.

- ◆ Recruit and In-service Training Sections: Sixty-five special duty firefighters work in the Recruit Services Section and the In-service Training Section of the Training Bureau. In these positions, the special duty firefighters are involved in recruit services, recruitment and the two training academies, including acting as instructors. The firefighters assigned to in-service training are paramedics who work with civilian educators to provide updates and training regarding EMT certification.

It seems reasonable that in-service training positions are filled with sworn employees.

- ◆ Quality Improvement Section: This section has two units with a battalion chief overseeing its operations: The Dispatch Unit is staffed with six sworn paramedics on special duty assignments who listen to recorded EMS runs/calls and review them to ensure compliance with LAFD's procedures and protocols. These firefighter-paramedics also provide training.

It appears reasonable that trained civilian paramedics on permanent assignment can effectively fulfill the duties of the Dispatch Unit. We believe that civilian paramedics can provide continuity beyond two years and specific paramedic skills needed, especially where the added fire suppression expertise is not required.

- ◆ EMS Unit: The EMS unit has six firefighter-paramedics who ensure LAFD's compliance with the Department of Health Services for EMT and Paramedic standards and services provided to the citizens of Los Angeles.

It appears reasonable that EMS positions are filled with sworn paramedics as these employees have the knowledge of LAFD's paramedic standards and can apply their special duty work with those standards when they return to the field at the completion of their two-year rotations.

- ◆ Risk Management: This section was organized about a year ago, and was heavily focused on reducing LAFD's workers compensation costs. It is staffed with five special duty assignees. Overall, Risk Management monitors employee injuries, tracks sick leave usage via LAFD's timekeeping system, investigates why the injury took place, prepares reports that analyze the causes and implications of the injuries, and works with supervisors to address the causes. One of the four special duty captains assigned to this section acts as the LAFD's Safety Officer and as the department's representative for all OSHA-related incidents. LAFD believes sworn members are essential in these positions because they have fire fighting experience in the field.

Because decisions related to accepting certain levels of risk as well as decisions related to care of injured employees can significantly impact the health and safety of LAFD employees as well as the residents of Los Angeles, those rendering the decisions must have considerable legal, behavioral, and organizational expertise and knowledge. Consequently, specially trained workers compensation and risk management civilians on permanent assignment could replace four of the five special duty assignees in this section. The special duty position acting as the LAFD Safety Officer should remain a sworn firefighter since he/she provides the added perspective of on-the-job safety from their past experience.

- ♦ *Quality Assurance:* The Quality Assurance unit is responsible for overseeing the policies and procedures related to the 12-month field probationary training period and recommending changes to the training process. Six Quality Assurance captains on special duty follow-up on each new recruit in the field at specified intervals (4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> month) to assess their level of performance as well as evaluate the training instruction in order to ensure that LAFD standards are maintained. If deficiencies are identified in a probationer's performance, it is mandatory that Quality Assurance is notified so that meetings can be arranged to develop specific plans for remediation or review recommendations for termination.

It seems reasonable that these positions are filled with sworn employees.

### **Opportunities to Civilianize Bureau of Training and Risk Management Assignments**

Within the Training Bureau, we have identified 10 special duty positions that could be converted to civilians. These positions include six civilians trained as paramedics and four civilians with risk management and workers compensation expertise.

### **Headquarter's Administration**

LAFD's Fire Chief under his headquarter's administration, has 11 special duty positions, which are generally two-year rotating positions. These assignments involve a number of areas ranging from purely administrative functions to conducting investigations.

- ♦ *Chief of Staff:* This position directs the Fire Chief's staff on behalf of the Fire Chief and also includes performing outreach to stakeholders outside the LAFD (e.g. employee organizations, commissioners, city council, CAO, CLA, etc).

It seems reasonable that this position is filled with a sworn employee.

- ♦ *Community Liaison Unit:* This unit has two special duty positions, a Community Liaison Officer (special duty Battalion Chief) and a Community Relations Officer (special duty captain). The main responsibilities of these positions are to maintain channels of communication between citizens and the LAFD as well as act as spokespersons for the department via the media. Although it is important for the key LAFD public spokesperson to be a sworn member, the unit must also have public relations resources knowledgeable of local and national political and legal environments, experience in dealing with and building relationships with the media and community-based organizations, as well as managing appropriate, and legally compliant, communication with employees.

We believe a permanent civilian employee specifically trained in public relations and able to develop an institutional perspective beyond the two-year rotation currently available should fill the Community Relations Officer position.

- ♦ *Planning Section:* This section has five special duty positions, (a Battalion Chief and four captains). These positions assist the Fire Chief in strategic planning for the LAFD and require the ability to write from the "point of view" of a sworn member as well as analyze the impact of strategic decisions on the department. One position in

this section is not the normal two-year rotating assignment as a result of restricted duty.

It seems reasonable that the planning section positions be filled with sworn employees.

- ♦ **Operations Section:** This section is headed by the Operations Commander and administers disciplinary actions that rise through the chain of command for all levels of LAFD's sworn and civilian employees. The Operations Commander has three special duty positions reporting to him – an Operations Executive Officer (special duty Battalion Chief) and two Advocate Investigators (special duty captains). One Advocate Investigator does not serve on a normal two-year rotating assignment as a result of restricted duty. The Operations Executive Officer is responsible for managing LAFD's disciplinary process and any resulting investigations that occur. This officer provides direct supervision of Advocate Investigators who conduct field investigations of fellow firefighters.

In the City Controller's recent audit report on LAFD's management of human relations,<sup>8</sup> the Advocate Investigator and Executive Officer positions are recommended for replacement with trained investigators, either civilian or sworn, rather than special duty firefighters.

#### **Opportunities to Civilianize Headquarter's Administration Assignments**

We believe that the Community Relations Officer special duty position should be replaced with a civilian trained in public relations, and the Command Executive Officer and two special duty Advocate Investigators should be replaced by specifically trained, and permanently assigned, civilian or sworn investigators.

### **Benefits of Converting these 18 Special Duty positions**

Converting the 18 identified special duty positions allows LAFD to redeploy trained and experienced firefighters to first-line fire suppression, rescue or emergency medical services. Moreover, being able to offset firefighter recruitment, training, probation and development costs already invested in these seasoned firefighters would be substantial in the long run. The residents of Los Angeles also benefit from LAFD utilizing its firefighters to help fulfill its primary mission – as an “all risk life safety response provider.”

Although we did not calculate the salary and benefit savings associated with the conversion of special duty assignments to permanent civil service positions because the costs of each would need to be based on first identifying a City job classification applicable to the tasks required, or creating one to meet LAFD's needs. Because some of these positions are administrative in nature, yet are staffed by high-level sworn members, civilian salaries and benefits are likely to be lower in those cases. On the other hand, the cost of highly skilled civilians in other positions may be higher. Overall, the City should benefit from cost savings and utilizing highly trained firefighters in first-line fire suppression, rescue or emergency medical services.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Review of the Los Angeles Fire Department Management Practices*, issued January 26, 2006.

Furthermore, another important benefit of hiring permanent specifically-trained civilians relates to the fact that they do not rotate every two years to their original positions as many of the special duty assignees do. In each of the 18 special duty positions we recommend for civilianizing, the LAFD will benefit from the continuity, institutional knowledge and skill development that a permanent civilian employee rather than a rotational firefighter can provide. These benefits are beyond the initial training and experience each will bring to LAFD from their prior positions. And in some cases, converting selected special duty assignments to permanent sworn firefighter assignments will generate similar benefits when the specific skills developed by the firefighter over the two-year assignment are lost upon redeployment.

When a special duty assignment is filled by restricted duty firefighters, we realize that they cannot be returned to first-line fire suppression, rescue or emergency medical operations. On page 22 of Chapter I of the report, we discuss how LAFD can continue to utilize restricted duty firefighters in many non-firefighting support or administrative roles within special duty or similar assignments throughout the department.



## Chapter III – Conclusion and Recommendations

---

LAFD has a long history of using sworn firefighters in support or administrative roles throughout its five bureaus. Most of these assignments generate benefits to both the department and the firefighter by matching highly skilled sworn members to departmental needs that could not be accomplished with civilians or less experienced firefighters. In these instances, taking skilled firefighters out of their direct roles in fire suppression, rescue or medical emergencies is organizationally justified.

However, we found some positions staffed by firefighters that could be efficiently and effectively filled with civilian civil service personnel. Although the number of such positions is small (80 firefighters) in comparison to LAFD's department-wide total of 3,400 firefighters, redeploying these sworn members to first-line firefighting, rescue or emergency medical services results in the highest and best use of their collective training and expertise.

Most of the positions we believe could be converted to civilian staff are call takers within the Operations Control Division's 9-1-1 dispatch unit. We believe that 62 of the 88 sworn firefighters (commanders, captains, resource controllers and call takers) can be civilianized. The remaining 26 firefighters would remain in command positions or to direct the dispatching of LAFD resources to the emergency incident. Not only would this allow LAFD to redeploy the remaining firefighters to first-line duty but could generate an annual savings to the City of at least \$2.3 million to \$3.8 million. Converting from 24-hour per day shifts to 8, 10 or 12 hour shifts also provides an opportunity to place the appropriate number of staff on each shift to address peaks and valleys experienced in call volume, rather than have an equal number of staff for the entire 24-hour period.

Additionally, we identified 18 of the LAFD's 300 special duty positions that we believe could be converted to civilian staff. Job descriptions and duties of these positions lend themselves to civilianizing and, again, would allow LAFD to redeploy these firefighting resources. It is not possible to estimate any savings resulting from these conversions since LAFD would need to study the appropriate civil service classification and pay scale for each position. However, since these positions require specialized administrative skills and many of the firefighters who fill these jobs are on two-year rotational assignments, full-time permanent civilians could be hired already possessing the needed backgrounds and skills, and would be able to develop their expertise beyond the current two-year rotation.

Consequently, we make the following recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

We recommend that the Fire Commission:

- ◆ Plan an implementation strategy with the Mayor, City Council and key stakeholders to address civilianizing 62 firefighter call takers, and 18 special duty positions within LAFD.

We also recommend that the Fire Commission direct the LAFD to:

- ◆ Begin the process of converting 62 sworn call takers to civilian call takers, including:
  - Conducting a time and task study with 2005 data to determine the number of civilian call takers needed based on hourly emergency call volumes, average call duration and required service levels.
  - Determining the preferred shift schedule (e.g. 8, 10 or 12 hours) to meet demands over a 24-hour period, and establish the number of call takers needed during each shift to meet peaks and valleys of call volumes.
  - Identifying and developing a training program for civilian emergency medical dispatchers with input from industry sources, comparable civilian fire department dispatch centers and LAPD.
  - Developing a sworn and civilian command structure that also outlines the roles and responsibilities of civilian call takers and sworn dispatch resource controllers.
- ◆ Consider redeploying 18 special duty firefighters to first-line fire suppression, rescue or emergency medical services.
- ◆ Work with the Personnel Department to identify comparable civilian civil service positions within the City's current job classifications based on the job descriptions and duties required.
- ◆ Review the two-year rotation policy on selected special duty assignments to determine if they should be converted to permanent sworn positions to address needed continuity and attainment of specialized skills that take more than two years to develop.
- ◆ Ensure that restricted duty firefighters are assigned to non-physically demanding positions within the department, thus allowing redeployment of regular duty firefighters to first-line positions.