

Training and Working Conditions PENCOM Communications Officer

Following is detailed information about the working conditions and training process in the PenCom Communication Center. Please take time to review this information, as we will be asking for your response.

Working Conditions ~

Working conditions in the 911 Center are very different from working in an open office or customer service counter. You will see that the Center is located in a secure and isolated area. Breaks are usually taken alone, and there is very little time for leaving the console, socializing, eating on the job, looking out the window or texting friends. So, this type of work can feel isolating.

It is sometimes very stressful and noisy. When you begin work each day, you must be alert and responsive at all times. Frequently you would be continuously taking and giving information. You must think clearly, react quickly with good judgment, remain calm and produce results. When you are “on shift” you must be at your best at all times.

Training ~

The training period is approximately 16 weeks long and consists of both classroom time and console training. We intertwine the two so the new hires are able to apply what they are learning in the classroom at the consoles. The time frames may fluctuate based on the individual’s learning curve, ensuring each new hire has been given every opportunity to succeed.

The first nine weeks of classroom training (usually day shift) includes going over policies and procedures, geography, call taking, PC and CAD, law enforcement communications, Access, Fire and Med, agency specific equipment, and special procedures and liability. You will be asked to do a lot of reading and to memorize information for quick response.

For initial training at the console, you will “plug in” with an experienced dispatcher to observe daily operations. As classroom training progresses, the new dispatcher will spend the remaining weeks entirely at the console applying what has been learned and working on speed, accuracy, and confidence. This training will vary on day or swing shift. During this time, a supervisor/trainer is “plugged in” to observe and provide feedback.

During the training period, you will receive constant feedback about your progress. In the classroom and observation training, people tend to do very well. As we move to the hands-on training, people have a more difficult time receiving the daily feedback about errors and needed improvement. Sometimes individuals believe that we are being unfair and picking on them. While this can be difficult, the trainer must diligently provide feedback to assist trainees in getting to the independent level of performance that is required to be successful in this job.

By this description, you can see that the selection and training is very costly for the City. We need to consider applicants who are most likely to succeed in training for this job. We are going to select individuals who demonstrate the personal discipline and commitment it takes to develop a career.

Only about 50% of the applicants hired complete training and are successful in the position. We do not mean to scare or intimidate you, but we want you to have a realistic picture of what the first 6-8 months will be like. New employees will sometimes tell us “I knew this was going to be a lot to learn, but I didn’t know it was going to be this difficult.”

On the other hand, if you are successful, you will become part of a very committed and closely knit work group!