

Chester County Department of Emergency Services

Client-at-a-Glance

Chester County is one of the three original counties created by William Penn in 1682. While the area is a tourist destination of mostly rural and quaint villages, it deals with very modern issues. Chester County's staff of 9-1-1 Operators for the Department of Emergency Services fields some 850 calls per day. These 72 operators dispatch fire, police, or emergency medical technicians to the scene of emergencies.

Finding Quality Operators Saves Money for Chester County

A 9-1-1 Operator must possess the ability to instill calmness, elicit critical information from callers, accurately dispatch emergency services, and keep track of all personnel and equipment responding to the call. They handle a large volume of calls from people who are typically upset, sometimes to the point of hysteria.

The Chester County Department of Emergency Services, in West Chester, PA, has 14 operators on at one time and is open 24 hours per day. The complex nature of calls and the necessary attention to detail required to handle this high stress position, has resulted in turnover among operators.

Deputy Director John Haynes combats turnover by providing ample vacation time and using a four-days-on/four-days-off schedule. None of these measures, however, prevent turnover in an employee who simply isn't right for the job.

To help hire operators and reduce turnover rates, Haynes began using the Hay Aptitude Test Battery (HAY). The tests ensure that hired operators are comfortable handling large volume detail accurately in a limited time period. "I began using the Hay Aptitude Test Battery eight

years ago," says Haynes. "Before then, I'd send eight or ten people through our extensive—and expensive—training program hoping we'd have maybe three left. Now, I hire just three to four people and send them through training, and we're retaining them."

Haynes says the tests help him find people with invaluable key characteristics difficult to discern in an interview. "I need to know they're able to multi-task with a high degree of accuracy under great pressure." Aside from retaining quality operators, the tests make sure that new hires won't weaken under the pressure of life-and-death calls.

While the national average for turnover is around 17% in a 9-1-1 Center, Chester County maintains a 5% turnover rate. This not only saves the tax payers money, it saves lives by having trained, experienced professionals answering emergency calls. "It takes a lot of money to train Telecommunicators," Haynes says. "And it's coming from the pocketbooks of the citizens of Chester County."



Before using the Wonderlic Hay Aptitude Test Battery, Haynes says that his trainers were skeptical of new recruits. Now trainers take joy in investing time and energy in the 12-week program. "They see the classroom as our future and really invest themselves in these new recruits," says Haynes. **"Being able to hire the right people from the outset has been a great help."**

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