



Memorandum

TO: PUBLIC SAFETY, FINANCE,
AND STRATEGIC SUPPORT
COMMITTEE

FROM: Robert Sapien, Jr.

SUBJECT: Fire Department
Communications Annual
Report

DATE: January 29, 2026

Approved

Date:

2/11/2026

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the annual report on Fire Department Communications activities.

BACKGROUND

The San José Fire Department (Department) is a high-volume, all-hazards fire department providing fire suppression and rescue services, Advanced Life Support, and Basic Life Support services, as well as specialized operations resources, including Urban Search and Rescue, Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting, and a Hazardous Incident Team. The Department deploys resources from 34 fire stations, with minimum daily staffing levels of 190 personnel operating on 34 Engine companies, nine Truck companies, three Rescue medic units, and six command officers (Battalion Chiefs). The Department's frontline personnel protect 208 square miles, including 181 square miles within city limits and approximately 27 square miles of unincorporated areas of Santa Clara County by contract.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-2025, the Department's Fire Communications Division was staffed¹ by 1.0 Division Manager, 3.0 Supervising Public Safety Dispatchers (Supervising PSD), 11.0 Senior Public Safety Dispatchers (Senior PSD), and 30.48 Public Safety Radio Dispatchers. Dispatch personnel assigned to Fire Communications Operations monitor, dispatch, and track the movement of over 100 frontline apparatus responding from 34 fire stations. Additionally, Fire Communications has 1.0 Senior Office Specialist and 1.0 Analyst who provide administrative and analytical support within the Division. During this period, Fire Communications answered 107,119 9-1-1

¹ To address Fire Communications call processing performance, recruitment, and training challenges, 2.0 Public Safety Communication Specialist positions were added through the 2025-2026 Adopted Budget.

and 10-digit emergency line calls², and dispatched and supported 111,372 emergency incidents – resulting in a 3.97% increase in 9-1-1 and 10-digit emergency line calls answered in comparison to FY 2023-2024, and a 1.19% increase in emergency incidents.

Dispatchers utilize the Fire Priority Dispatch System (FPDS)³ and Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS)⁴ to ask callers a series of triage questions to identify the nature of the emergency. Based on this information, the dispatcher determines the appropriate resources needed, initiates resource dispatch and maintains communication with the caller to provide life-saving instructions.

Table 1 below shows Fire Communications FPDS and MPDS Call-Taking Compliance for FY 2024-2025 compared to the worldwide Accredited Center of Excellence averages. Compared to FY 2023-2024, Fire Communications had a 1% decrease in FPDS call-taking compliance and a 1% increase in MPDS call-taking compliance while the worldwide average had a 0.21% increase in FPDS call-taking compliance and an average 0.20% increase in MPDS call-taking compliance. Fire Communications’ compliance rates remain well above the worldwide Accredited Center of Excellence averages.

Table 1: FY 2024-2025 Fire Department Call-Taking Compliance⁵

Protocol	Fire Communications	Average of all Accredited Centers of Excellence Worldwide
Fire Priority Dispatch System	94%	87.88%
Medical Priority Dispatch System	96%	88.63%

ANALYSIS

While Fire Communications maintains commendably high-performance levels, authorized staffing numbers and public safety answering point capacity have not kept pace with increased service demands. This limited capacity is most visible in 9-1-1 call answer time compliance and disconnected call rates, measured as “abandoned call rates.” Abandoned 9-1-1 call rates peaked in FY 2022-2023 at 19.38%. These rates then decreased in FY 2023-2024 from 16.00% to 10.26% in FY 2024-2025. In addition,

² Calls categorized under the “10-digit emergency line” are calls made to (408) 277-8991 and a non-published number maintained for emergency call transfers in accordance with Cal OES standards.

³ <https://www.emergencydispatch.org/what-we-do/emergency-priority-dispatch-system/fire-protocol>

⁴ <https://www.emergencydispatch.org/what-we-do/emergency-priority-dispatch-system/medical-protocol>

⁵ Percent of call reviews identified through the quality assurance process as being in High Compliance or Compliant with call-taking protocols.

total call volume declined from 120,291 in FY 2022-2023 to 116,329 in FY 2024-2025, which can be attributed to the decline in abandoned 9-1-1 calls in these two fiscal years.

9-1-1 Call Answer Time Compliance Rate

The State of California 9-1-1 Emergency Communications Branch is operated by the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services and has established mandatory standards for 9-1-1.⁶ As of March 2023, the new California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services 9-1-1 call answer time standard is “*Ninety (90%) percent of all 9-1-1 calls arriving at the Public Safety Answering Point SHALL be answered within Fifteen (15) seconds. Ninety-five (95%) of all 9-1-1 calls SHOULD be answered within twenty (20) seconds.* The California 9-1-1 Branch realizes that unpredictable spikes may occur and will take abnormalities into consideration when reviewing statistics.”

Table 2 breaks down Fire Communications’ 9-1-1 call answer time compliance from FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025. Based on this data from the last five fiscal years, Fire Communications has not met the standard. As call volume has increased, compliance rate decreased. When call volume decreased in FY 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, the compliance rate increased. From FY 2023-2024, there was a 5.70% increase in compliance for 9-1-1 calls answered within 20 seconds and a 5.79% increase in compliance for 9-1-1 calls answered within 15 seconds.

Table 2: 9-1-1 California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services Call Answer Time Compliance FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025

Fiscal Year	9-1-1 Lines Answered Within 20-Seconds (95% Compliance)	9-1-1 Lines Answered Within 15-Seconds (90% Compliance)	9-1-1 Lines Call Volume	9-1-1 Lines Answered Within 20 Seconds	9-1-1 Lines Answer Times 15 Seconds
20-21	88.28%	87.28%	75,276	66,456	65,699
21-22	86.36%	85.30%	83,521	72,125	71,245
22-23	79.12%	78.13%	94,864	75,055	74,117
23-24	81.11%	80.11%	91,827	74,480	73,561
24-25	86.90%	85.81%	89,728	77,972	76,999

Language Access

In response to community emergencies, verbal communications are critical in the Fire Communications Center. Dispatchers obtain incident details and provide pre-arrival instructions to 9-1-1 callers while field resources are en route. Fire Communications dispatchers utilize language interpreter services provided by CyraCom (formerly

⁶ <https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/PSC/Documents/Chapter-I-Standards-update-2023.pdf>

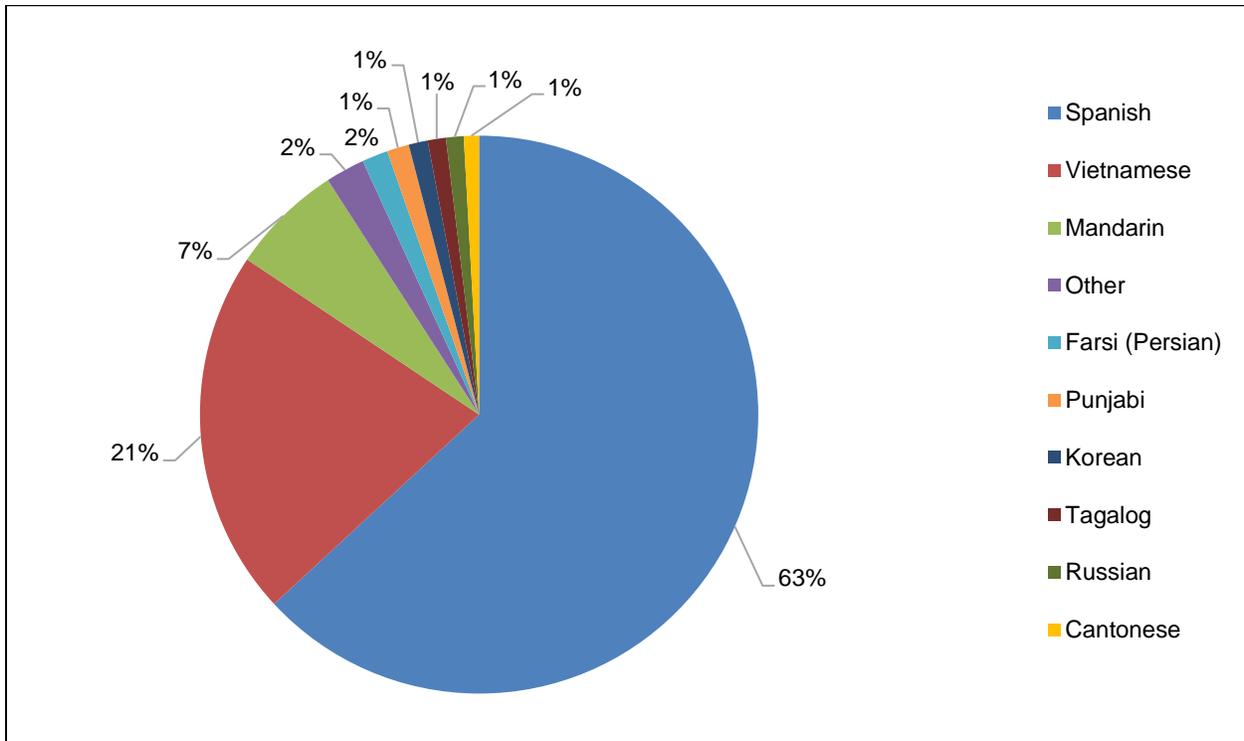
Voiance), which is contracted by the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services to assist in processing incoming 9-1-1 calls. The Department utilizes Language Line Solutions for interpreter services when needed for calls received on non-emergency phone lines and for face-to-face interactions.

Bilingual Capabilities

Fire Communications has one dispatcher certified by the City as proficient in Spanish and one certified as proficient in Vietnamese. Not all dispatchers who speak another language choose to undergo the voluntary certification process. Dispatchers who do not speak another language, or do not choose to undergo the voluntary certification process, utilize CyraCom when needed for interpreter services. Dispatcher recruitment materials advertise bilingual pay as an available benefit and include oral fluency in Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese as a desirable qualification. Dispatcher recruitment brochures are maintained and distributed in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Chart 1 below displays frequently encountered language needs in which CyraCom and Language Line Solutions were utilized in FY 2024-2025.

Chart 1: Fiscal Year 2024-2025 CyraCom and Language Line Interpreter Service



Emergency Phone Call Volume

From FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025, Fire Communications' emergency phone call volume increased by 19.14%, from 97,641 to 116,329. However, compared to FY 2023-2024, call volume decreased slightly by 1.18% in FY 2024-2025.

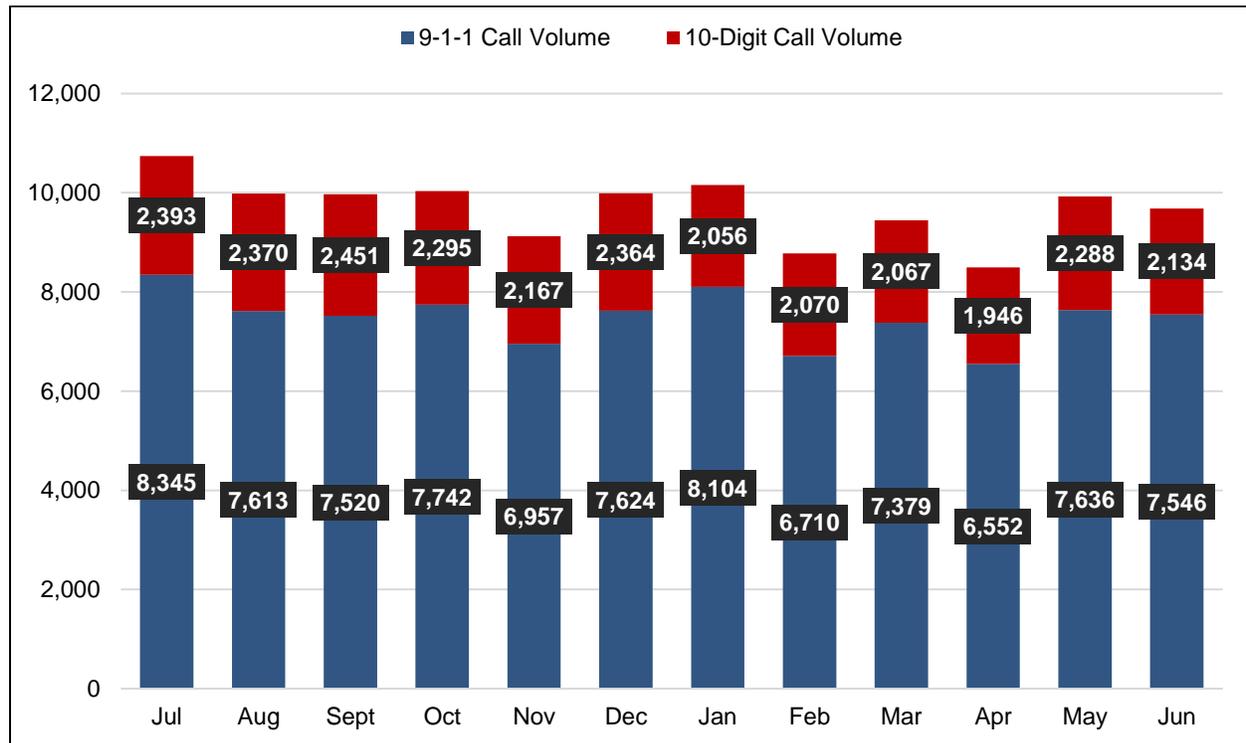
As shown in Table 3 below, the combined 9-1-1 and 10-digit emergency line call volume rose sharply from FY 2020-2021 to FY 2022-2023 and slightly decreased during FY 2023-2024 and FY 2024-2025.

**Table 3: 9-1-1 and 10-Digit Emergency Line Call Volume
FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025**

Fiscal Year	% Change	Total Call Volume	9-1-1 Call Volume	10-Digit Call Volume
20-21	4.21%	97,641	75,276	22,365
21-22	10.70%	108,085	83,521	24,564
22-23	11.29%	120,291	94,864	25,427
23-24	-2.14%	117,715	91,827	25,888
24-25	-1.18%	116,329	89,728	26,601

Chart 2 provides emergency line volume from FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025.

Chart 2: FY 2024-2025 9-1-1 and 10-Digit Emergency Line Call Volume



Abandoned 9-1-1 Call Rate

Abandoned 9-1-1 calls are defined by the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) as “an emergency Call in which the caller disconnects before the Call can be answered by the Public Safety Answering Point.”⁶ Fire Communications’ abandoned calls include both calls where callers disconnect and when Police Communications cancels the call transfer attempt. If all Fire Communications personnel assigned to call-taking duties are already on active calls, Police Communications can cancel the transfer attempt, create a Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system event for Fire Department and ambulance response, and then attempt the transfer again. This ensures that Department and ambulance response resources can be quickly dispatched even before Fire Communications personnel can speak with the caller to triage the event. This occurrence is captured in 9-1-1 abandoned call statistics, as a canceled transfer attempt is considered by the phone system to be an abandoned call. Police Communications stays on the line when transferring 9-1-1 calls to Fire Communications until Fire Communications answers the call and determines the location and nature of the

⁶ “Abandoned Call,” NENA Master Glossary of 9-1-1 Terminology, National Emergency Number Association, January 20, 2020, pg. 18 of 206. <https://www.nena.org/page/Glossary>

emergency. Therefore, the Police Communications call taker is aware when a caller disconnects before Fire Communications answers the call.

Table 4 below provides the Department’s historical abandoned call rate data, ranging from 7.76% during FY 2020-2021, to its highest rate of 19.38% during FY 2022-2023 when compared to overall 9-1-1 emergency line call volume. The Department has observed a gradual decrease in the proportionate volume of abandoned call rates from its reported peak in FY 2022-2023. In FY 2024-2025, the Department reports an approximate 5.74% reduction when compared to the last reporting year.

Table 4: 9-1-1 and Abandoned Call Rate FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025

Fiscal Year	9-1-1 Call Volume	9-1-1 Abandoned Call Volume	9-1-1 Abandoned Call Rate
20-21	75,276	5,840	7.76%
21-22	83,521	9,691	11.60%
22-23	94,864	18,382	19.38%
23-24	91,827	14,689	16.00%
24-25	89,728	9,210	10.26%

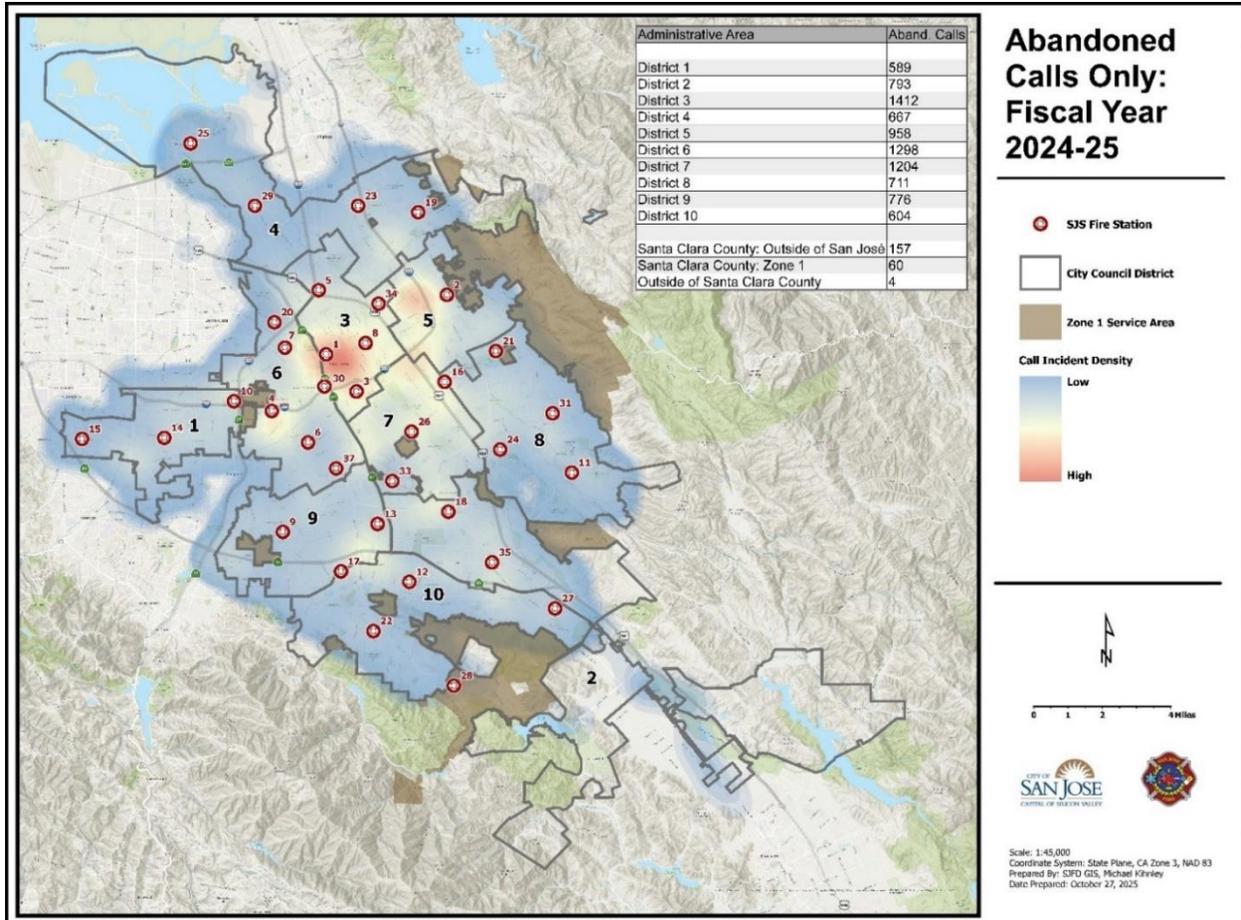
**Note: The data presented reflects reports ran on September 29, 2025.*

It is important to note that the Department’s abandoned call rate is calculated with calls exclusively received through the 9-1-1 emergency line. Fire Communications’ phone system reporting software does not have the capability to record abandoned call data from the 10-digit emergency lines.

9-1-1 Abandoned Calls Location

To better understand the nature of abandoned call rates in San José, Fire Communications engaged with the Department’s Geographic Information Systems team to create heat maps for abandoned call volume by City Council District using data in FY 2024-2025. Figure 1 shows the highest density of 9-1-1 abandoned calls for FY 2024-2025 within portions of City Council Districts 3, 6, and 7. This aligns with the City Council Districts where the highest volume of 9-1-1 calls originated. These results are comparable to FY 2023-2024, where the highest density of 9-1-1 abandoned calls were also within portions of City Council Districts 3, 6, and 7. Additionally, FY 2023-2024 only measured the highest density of 9-1-1 abandoned cellular calls due to limitations in the phone reporting software that have since been resolved for FY 2024-2025.

Figure 1: 9-1-1 Abandoned Calls in FY 2024-2025



*Note: 37 abandoned calls did not have location data.

Emergency Medical Event Triage

MPDS triage is a preliminary assessment used to determine the urgency of a patient's condition and type of care needed. In the Fire Communications environment, a medical event is considered triaged when an Emergency Medical Dispatcher assigns an MPDS determinant, which classifies the emergency based on the information provided by the caller. The MPDS determinant guides the Department's resource assignment, response level (Code 2: no lights/no sirens or Code 3: with lights and sirens), and is used by County Communications to determine the ambulance dispatch level. Additionally, CAD events are classified as either triaged or untriaged depending on whether the final event type assigned to the event was or was not an MPDS determinant.

In FY 2024-2025, for events created at Fire Communications terminals, the medical event triage rate was 86.56%, which is a 0.14% decrease from FY 2023-2024. When considering events created at both Fire Communications and Police Communications

CAD terminals, the combined triage rate was 65.92%, which is a 1.99% increase from FY 2023-2024. Events generated by Santa Clara County Communications and received via a CAD interface reflected a triaged final event type at a rate of 51.04%, which is a 4.15% increase from FY 2023-2024. This figure is based solely on the final event type within Fire Communications' CAD system. Fire Communications may change the event type when needed and communicate updated resource needs to County Communications by telephone.

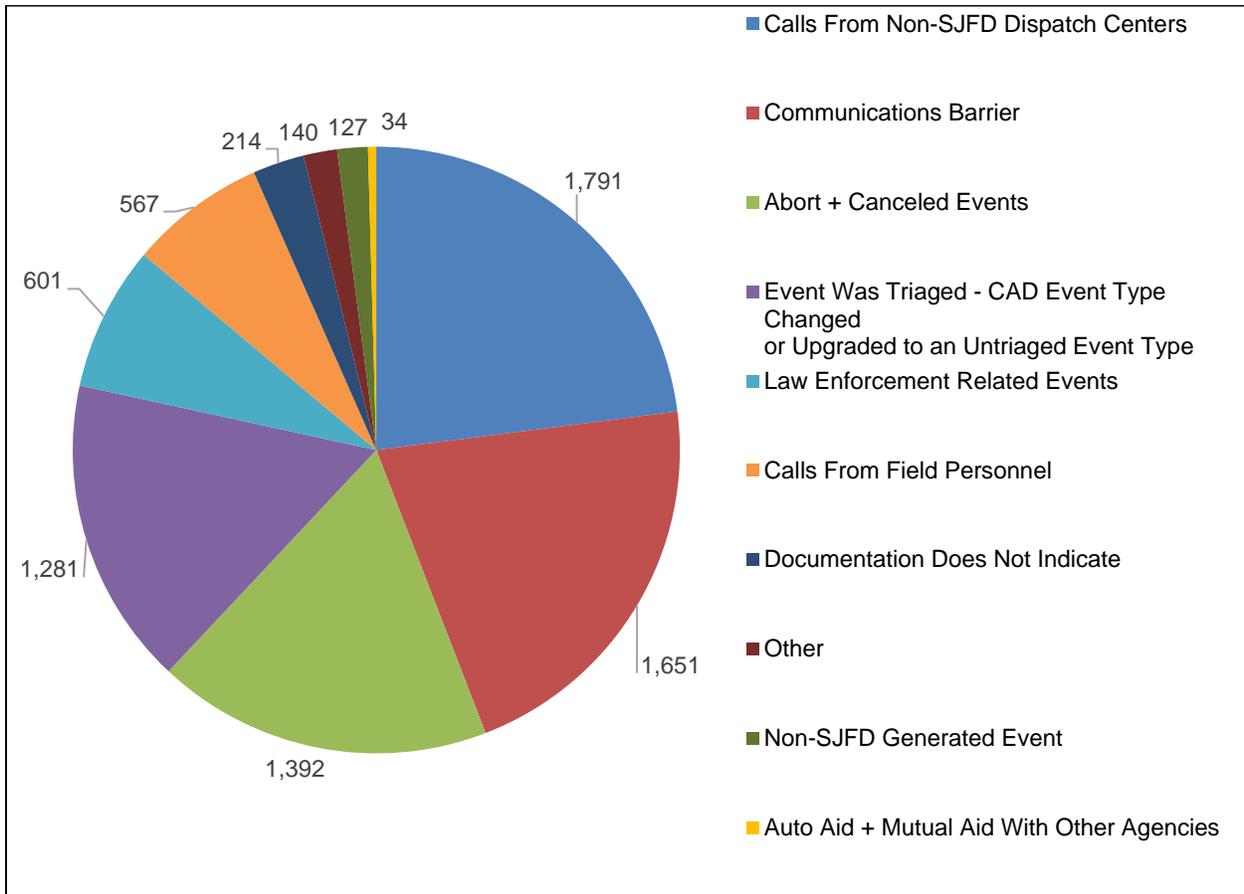
Table 5 breaks down the emergency medical events created at Fire Communications terminals from FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025. Additionally, this table shows the percentage of medical events with an MPDS Final Event Type and the percentage of medical events with a non-MPDS final event type.

**Table 5: Emergency Medical Event Triage FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025
(Events Created at Fire Communications Terminals)**

Fiscal Year	Medical Events	Percentage Medical Event Change	Medical Events with a MPDS Final Event Type	Percentage Medical Events with a MPDS Final Event Type	Medical Events with a Non-MPDS Final Event Type	Percentage Medical Events with a Non-MPDS Final Event Type
20-21	49,086	0.01%	40,979	83.48%	8,107	16.52%
21-22	54,103	10.22%	45,787	84.63%	8,316	15.37%
22-23	57,307	5.92%	49,589	86.53%	7,718	13.47%
23-24	55,915	-2.43%	48,476	86.70%	7,439	13.30%
24-25	58,001	3.73%	50,203	86.56%	7,798	13.44%

Chart 3 further demonstrates untriated medical events created at Fire Communications terminals in FY 2024-2025. A manual review of each individually untriated medical event found that 16.43% were actually triaged, but the CAD event type was later changed or upgraded to an untriated event type to facilitate appropriate resource deployment. An additional 80.83% could not be triaged due to a documented reason, and 2.74% lacked documentation indicating the reason why the event could not be triaged. In contrast to FY 2023-2024, the percentage of untriated medical events that were actually triaged decreased by 0.79%, events that could not be triaged for a documented reason decreased by 0.16%, and events lacking documentation increased by 0.95%.

Chart 3: FY 2024-2025 Reasons for Untriaged Medical Events



Standard Staffing Levels

Fire Communications maintains standard staffing levels to ensure the provision of critical services. Current standard staffing levels are stated in Table 6.

Table 6: Standard Staffing Levels by Shift

Shift	Duration	Standard Staffing
Day	6:30 AM - 2:30 PM	6
Swing	2:30 PM - 10:30 PM	6
Midnight ⁷	10:30 PM - 6:30 AM	5

⁷ Standard staffing is augmented to six personnel on Friday and Saturday nights from 10:30 PM - 2:30 AM based on statistics on activity levels where the highest period of call volume is experienced historically. Every shift requires 1 Senior PSD present.

Table 7 shows the FY 2024-2025 authorized budgeted full-time equivalent (FTE) positions by classification.

Table 7: FY 2024-2025 Authorized Budgeted Positions by Classification

Classification	FTE
Public Safety Radio Dispatcher	30.48
Senior Public Safety Dispatcher	11.0
Supervising Public Safety Dispatcher	3.0

The authorized FTEs within the dispatcher classification series had remained stagnant since 2010, while 9-1-1 and 10-digit emergency call volume increased by 54.68% between FY 2011-2012 and FY 2024-2025. In FY 2010-2011, 3.0 Senior Public Safety Dispatcher FTEs were added to support the Department's dynamic deployment initiative. In FY 2011-2012, 2.0 Senior PSD positions were reclassified to Public Safety Radio Dispatcher positions for a total of 44.48 FTE.

It should be noted, however, that through the 2025-2026 Adopted Budget, the Department increased its total authorized budgeted positions by 1.0 FTE resulting from the elimination of a vacant Senior PSD position and adding 2.0 Public Safety Communication Specialist positions. The Public Safety Communication Specialist positions will focus on call taking to offer incremental improvement of call answer time compliance and reduction of abandoned call rate. Additional resources needed to support an increased level of service would need to be evaluated within the context of the City's overall budget picture, including tradeoffs with other City Council priorities. Solutions to staffing levels will be weighed against the Department's budget and staffing constraints.

Fire Communications Attrition

Over the last five fiscal years, Fire Communications has experienced varying vacancy rates across the Public Safety Radio Dispatcher, Senior PSD, and Supervising PSD classifications.

Table 8 shows the vacancies from FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025 for each classification.

Table 8: Vacancies Per Classification from FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025

Fiscal Year	Public Safety Radio Dispatcher		Senior Public Safety Dispatcher		Supervising Public Safety Dispatcher	
	Vacancies	Budgeted FTEs	Vacancies	Budgeted FTEs	Vacancies	Budgeted FTEs
20-21	5.48	30.48	2	11.0	0	3.0
21-22	5.48	30.48	3	11.0	1	3.0
22-23	11	30.48	3	11.0	0	3.0
23-24	5	30.48	2	11.0	0	3.0
24-25	6	30.48	1	11.0	0	3.0

During the recruitment for Academy 2025-02, applications for the Public Safety Radio Dispatcher Trainee classification increased by 2.86% compared to 2024-01; however applications have nearly doubled in comparison to recruitment for Academy 2023-02, largely due to the implementation of recommendations in the Fire Communications Recruitment Plan. A new recruitment was not performed for Academy 2025-01 which instead utilized the applicant list from Academy 2024-01.

While increased recruitment has increased applications, additional strategies are needed to ensure vacancies are filled. Two approved temporary overstrength positions have played an important role in filling the vacancies, by allowing Fire Communications to extend additional conditional job offers to offset the loss of candidates who do not successfully complete post-conditional hiring steps. Candidates initially hired into temporary overstrength positions have ultimately transitioned into permanent positions following attrition. In those cases, without the temporary overstrength positions, hiring into those positions would not have been possible until the next hiring process.

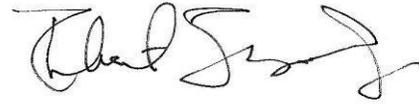
COORDINATION

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Attorney’s Office and City Manager’s Budget Office.

January 29, 2026

Subject: Fire Communications Annual Report

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Sapien, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Sapien, Jr.
Fire Chief, Fire Department

For questions, please contact Michael Wodnick, Fire Communications Division Manager, at michael.wodnick@sanjoseca.gov or (408) 794-1285.