

NEWS RELEASE

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BCES conducting review of 9-1-1 dispatching for Finley fire

Richland, Wash. – Benton County Emergency Services (BCES) is continuing to determine why it took more than three minutes for 911 dispatchers at the Southeast Communications Center to alert emergency responders of a house fire in Finley on April 21st and how to prevent such cases in the future.

“We have a responsibility to Benton County residents to respond as quickly as possible to their emergencies,” said Hans Kwast, BCES Director. “Taking three minutes to dispatch first responders is not the level of service we expect to provide.”

According to Kwast there were some circumstances surrounding the call that contributed to the delay, the majority of which being the inability to quickly identify the exact location of the fire. A review of the 911 call indicates that the caller provided an incomplete address. The dispatcher was ultimately able to identify the location using cross streets.

Once the address was identified, the information was transferred to the fire dispatcher to “tone out” emergency response personnel. This was delayed several seconds due to the fire dispatcher already being on the phone taking information from another call.

“It should not have taken more than three minutes to identify the fire’s location and send assistance,” says Kwast. “On our end, we are reviewing the steps taken by all involved personnel to see if there is something we can do procedurally, technically, or in our training program to lessen the chances of this happening again.”

Kwast stressed the importance of residents providing accurate information to SE-COMM when calling with an emergency, but acknowledges that 911 calls are made under very stressful conditions.

“People are extremely upset and emotional when making a call to report a potential life-threatening emergency,” added Kwast. “Our dispatchers are trained to help callers slow down and relax in order to provide accurate information as quickly as possible.”

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