

Wrong-way dispatchers say recent fire-call goofs Unified Call-Taking's fault

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The **NYPD** has disciplined 175 emergency dispatchers for giving wrong addresses about fires over the city's new Unified Call-Taking system in recent weeks.

The crackdown, following a string of highly publicized complaints from firefighters about bad addresses, has enraged the NYPD's civilian employees.

"We've been turned into scapegoats for problems in the computer system that the city hasn't fixed," one veteran dispatcher said. "Everyone is watching over our shoulders for every little mistake."

In 135 of the disciplinary cases, the dispatchers were docked vacation or sick time, said officials at District Council 37, the union for NYPD operators. The other

40 got warning letters.

Deputy Mayor Ed Skyler appeared to defend the dispatchers at a hearing last week.

"The overwhelming majority of UCT calls are handled appropriately," Skyler said. The number of human errors, he noted, was tiny compared with the more than 150,000 fire calls NYPD dispatchers transmitted since May.

Skyler and **NYPD Deputy Chief Charles Dowd**, who also appeared at the hearing, said nothing about the slew of command disciplines the NYPD has meted out.

Most of the nearly 2,000 complaints firefighters made about wrong addresses in recent months, were judged unfounded, **FDNY spokesman Frank Gribbon** said yesterday.

City officials are convinced the fire unions are inflating wrong address complaints because of fears that UCT will dramatically improve response time and lead to personnel cuts.

About 500 of those complaints that warranted further investigation were then

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forwarded to the NYPD, whose supervisors concluded that 175 were due to dispatcher mistakes.

But more than a dozen 911 dispatchers and supervisors who say they are frustrated by the crackdown told the Daily News that Police and Fire department brass are refusing to acknowledge big problems in the merged dispatch systems.

"There's thousands of addresses in our Sprint/CAD system that don't appear in the Fire Department's STARFIRE system," one supervisor said.

The STARFIRE system also automatically transposes cross-streets it receives from the police system, the dispatchers say. That can further confuse units dispatched to an emergency.

Such problems didn't matter before UCT, since dispatchers from each department kept their own information on emergency calls. Now that 911 operators are the only ones typing information into a unified system, compatibility has become a big deal.

Under the old system, when someone called 911 with a fire emergency, the NYPD

operator would take preliminary information, then connect the caller to a fire dispatcher who would take over all questioning.

With UCT, the NYPD operator does all the interviewing and then sends the information on to FDNY dispatchers by computer.

Skyler and Dowd have repeatedly claimed that all NYPD dispatchers received eight hours of training in the new UCT system - something the workers dispute.

"The most training we got was about 2-1/2 hours," another dispatcher said.

The city only called in FDNY dispatchers for a new round of training for some of the 1,200 NYPD dispatchers after the uproar began.

"We're finally learning how STARFIRE receives the information, and what additional questions the fire dispatchers need us to ask," another 911 supervisor said.

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