



# VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

## REPORT TO THE VANCOUVER POLICE BOARD

**REPORT DATE:** January 10, 2022  
**COMMITTEE MEETING DATE:** January 20, 2022  
**BOARD REPORT #** 2201C01  
*Regular*

**TO:** Vancouver Police Board Service and Policy Complaint Review Committee  
**FROM:** Mehrban Sidhu, Sergeant, E-Comm Liaison  
**SUBJECT:** Service or Policy Complaint #2021-16 Re: Non-Emergency Line Wait Time

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### RECOMMENDATION:

**THAT the Vancouver Police Board Service and Policy Review Complaint Committee ('Committee') concludes its review of the complaint based on the information outlined in the report.**

### SUMMARY:

On September 7, 2021, the complainant observed an individual using refuse to start a fire on a sidewalk. The individual then added fuel to make the fire larger. The complainant confronted the individual who responded in a threatening manner and a minor physical altercation ensued before the complainant left the area. The complainant later returned to the scene but the individual was no longer present and the fire was out. The complainant decided that the incident did not meet the threshold for a 9-1-1 call but felt the incident should be brought to the attention of the Vancouver Police Department (VPD). The complainant subsequently called the non-emergency line and waited on hold for two hours "to no avail." The next day, the complainant again called the non-emergency line and received "no response." The complainant further wrote, "I'm very concerned that there seems currently to be no effective way for citizens to report non-emergency criminal activity to the City or to the VPD."

The VPD's 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls for service (CFS) are contracted to E-Comm. In 2021, the average wait time for non-emergency calls was approximately six minutes but callers regularly experienced lengthy delays, often on hold for two hours or longer. Due to priority emergencies, calls to 9-1-1 have increased requiring non-emergency call-takers to be reassigned to 9-1-1 calls.

Currently, E-Comm is experiencing operational staffing shortages which have effected their ability to meet their target goals. Furthermore, calls that are medical in nature are transferred to BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS). BCEHS is also experiencing a significant staffing shortage and there are delays to downstream calls to BCEHS from E-Comm. In this particular incident, it appears that the complainant unfortunately called during a time when there were lower staffing

levels. The British Columbia Association of Chiefs of Police (BCACP) is aware of the issue and is working directly with E-Comm's senior management.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On September 7, 2021, the complainant observed an individual light a fire on a sidewalk. The complainant confronted the individual and an altercation occurred whereby the individual lunged at the complainant. The complainant then left the area for a short period of time and upon his return, observed that the individual had also left the area and the fire was no longer ablaze.

The complainant felt that the situation was "not an emergency situation requiring a call to 9-1-1 but... thought the VPD should be alerted [to] the incident..." The complainant then called the non-emergency line and waited on hold for two hours "to no avail." The following day the complainant again called the non-emergency line and his call was met with "no response." The complainant wrote, "I'm very concerned that there seems currently to be no effective way for citizens to report non-emergency criminal activity to the City or to the VPD." The complainant additionally stated, "I have had nothing but great experiences with the Vancouver Police and am grateful for their dedicated, professional service."

This complaint was received by the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (OPCC) on September 20, 2021, and on October 1, 2021, the OPCC forwarded the Service or Policy Complaint to the Vancouver Police Board.

## **DISCUSSION:**

As British Columbia's largest city and urban centre, Vancouver is the primary hub of employment, entertainment, culture, and tourism within the province. Due to the aforementioned factors, the VPD receives well over 600 CFS daily and the majority of those calls are placed via the reportee to E-Comm. From there, E-Comm prioritizes the calls and assigns them to officers based on each call's risk to public safety. Most citizens are not aware that when they contact 9-1-1 and the VPD's non-emergency line they are actually reaching E-Comm - a contracted third party service provider.

The VPD recognizes that a short wait time can be expected while contacting non-emergency; however, lengthy delays, such as two hours in this instance, are unacceptable to the VPD and not consistent with E-Comm's service delivery targets. A non-emergency call, although not urgent, is still a matter requiring police attention and should be processed in a timely fashion. The complainant's first non-emergency call was not answered due to lack of staff at E-Comm at the time. In 2021, the average response time for a non-emergency call was approximately six minutes; however, during peak delays, wait times are significantly longer, as evident in this incident.

Upon investigation of the complaint, E-Comm advised there were no major incidents affecting the ability to answer non-emergency calls, however, there were two periods on that particular day where there were peak delays, which were consistent with the timing of the complainant's call. E-Comm attempts to staff call-takers based on peak call volumes. Unfortunately, the VPD has recently noted longer than usual delays in E-Comm's answering of non-emergency calls. Currently, E-Comm is experiencing a number of operational staffing shortages.

From September 2020 to September 2021, there has been an 11% increase to 9-1-1 calls. When 9-1-1 calls increase, non-emergency call-takers are reassigned to 9-1-1 call taking duties thereby affecting non-emergency wait times. Calls that are medical in nature require down streaming to BCEHS. BCEHS is also experiencing a staffing shortage with their call-takers. One of the current

operating policies between E-Comm and BCEHS require that the E-Comm 9-1-1 call-takers remain on the line with a caller until the call is successfully down streamed to BCEHS. On November 30, 2021, E-Comm and BCEHS management implemented a temporary procedure allowing 9-1-1 medical calls to be down streamed to BCEHS's automated system, thereby freeing up 9-1-1 call-takers sooner.

Upon receiving this complaint, the VPD reached out to the complainant. The complainant stated that he was happy with the investigation of this complaint and understood that the reasons for the delay pertain to E-Comm and were not directly associated to the VPD. Also, as a result of this complaint, the VPD assigned officers to investigate the matter. The officers spoke to the complainant and completed a report related to the incident. In this particular incident, the details of the incident as provided by the complainant would support an emergency call to 9-1-1 as the individual was setting a fire, in addition to threatening the complainant with a weapon.

**CONCLUSION:**

The service demands for 9-1-1 and non-emergency are exceeding the existing capabilities of E-Comm. The issue is not unique to the VPD as it is affecting police agencies and emergency services throughout the province. The BCACP is aware of the issue and working directly with E-Comm's senior management.

Based on the information outlined in this report, it is recommended that the Committee concludes its review of this Service or Policy Complaint.

Author: Sergeant Mehrban Sidhu

Date: January 10, 2022

Submitting Executive Member: Deputy Chief Howard Chow

Date: January 10, 2022