# EP 16 Dept of Safety.mp3

**Wanda Scott:** [00:00:02] Most times we rely on the caller to tell us exactly where they are and a lot of times they don't know where exactly they are.

**Ben Henry:** [00:00:10] This is Wanda Scott. She's an administrator at a call center here in Concord. It's the call center where they answer 9-1-1 calls. And that's one of the first things they will ask you when you call 9-1-1. Where are you? It is surprisingly hard to answer that question.

**Wanda Scott:** [00:00:25] There are basic questions that we need to know. We need to know. Is the patient conscious? Are they breathing effectively? What what comes out of those first initial questions is what is the emergency exactly and how severe is it? That information is sent to dispatch, which then tells dispatch what is the emergency and how fast should they go?

**Ben Henry:** [00:00:44] Solving this kind of information in pass is what 9-1-1 operators are really good at. They wrangle concrete pieces of information from people who are sometimes in a panic.

**Wanda Scott:** [00:00:55] They can have one benign call, you know, ladder in the road and then hang up. And the next call that comes to them could be some horrific call. So it takes a unique kind of person.

**Ben Henry:** [00:01:07] 9-1-1 is not some huge national program. It's actually local. Every state has its own system. Here in New Hampshire, our 9-1-1 call centers are one part of the Department of Safety. And this department is huge. It's got 9-1-1. The state police, the fire marshal, they are the people either dealing with a crisis or preventing crises. So today, safety first. We're taking a tour of the department. This is Civics 101: New Hampshire. I'm Ben Henry. In total, sixteen hundred people work for the department. They are spread across the state. But the headquarters are in Concord. And that's where the commissioner, the top guy, Bob Quinn, works.

**Bob Quinn:** [00:01:47] I mean, the department of safety is one of the largest departments in state government. We affect the lives of all New Hampshire residents.

**Ben Henry:** [00:01:54] Quinn just recently became commissioner.

**Bob Quinn:** [00:01:56] We were established by the New Hampshire General Court in 1961. We have seven different divisions.

**Ben Henry:** [00:02:01] Department of Safety is part of the executive branch, meaning they don't write the laws. They don't interpret the laws. They carry out the laws. So cops, for example, pull you over. The fire marshal tells you how to build a building. The DMV. That's part of the Department of Safety. They test your driving skills.

**Bob Quinn:** [00:02:19] So if you look at the activities of all these divisions, they all go to keeping people safe. You know, since since I was hired in 1985, I think the department reacts in his fluid to the needs. So what are the safety needs of New Hampshire citizens today? We've had to respond to different issues. And as you know, I think the opioid crisis, what we're dealing with today is a prime example of how we have to we have to deploy and and and look at our resources and focus them on what's the largest threat.

**Ben Henry:** [00:02:53] So seven divisions. I visited a few of the big ones. First, the fire marshal. About a year ago, Paul Parissi was appointed fire marshal. He's one of those people. He reminds you how terrifying the world is.

**Paul Parissi:** [00:03:07] The furniture that we put into our houses today are literally made of plastic, which really is just a solid hydrocarbon fuel. And they burn extremely quickly with a dense, acrid smoke that will overcome the occupants very rapidly as the fire marshal.

**Ben Henry:** [00:03:30] It's his job to deal with this problem and lots of other problems. The fire marshal's office pretty much does everything except the actual firefighting.

**Bob Quinn:** [00:03:39] I tell you, Ben, the fire marshal's office and I really didn't even realize the breadth of the responsibility that the fire marshal's office has. But but in one minute, we have to investigate fire deaths, carbon monoxide deaths and deaths by building collapse. And that's a statutory requirement. We also have responsibility for licensing and permitting fireworks. We have a hazardous materials coordinator. We have a public education section. And then we have a whole bureau of building safety in construction.

**Ben Henry:** [00:04:16] When a construction company wants to build a new building, someone has to take a look at their plan just to make sure it's not horrifically unsafe. Sometimes that person is Paul and his staff. Other times it's the local building inspector or the local fire chief. Also, they will inspect the plumbing and gas fittings.

**Paul Parissi:** [00:04:35] So we do a lot. We say that we do, you know, everything from death investigations to bouncy house inspections and everything in between.

**Ben Henry:** [00:04:43] As part of the executive branch, they don't actually have authority to write the building codes, but they do make recommendations on them throughout the country. Most states have fairly similar building codes. But every state gets to make little adjustments.

**Paul Parissi:** [00:04:58] Yes, the legislature has amended our code in several ways.

**Ben Henry:** [00:05:02] The biggest change New Hampshire has made to our building codes. We no longer require sprinklers in homes. We used to the way most states do. But in 2012, we changed that. Now, Paul is a big fan of sprinklers. He says they save lives, but also they cost money. And the New Hampshire legislature decided they're not going to force people to spend that money. Here's another thing. Most states issued safety guidelines for corn mazes. That's right. Corn mazes, but not New Hampshire. Here you can make a corn maze as big and confusing as your Halloween spirit compels you.

**Paul Parissi:** [00:05:40] And then think about the possibility of someone either accidentally or intentionally lighting that on fire with a whole bunch of people in it. And fortunately, we have not had any sort of tragedy with regard to a corn maze in our state.

**Ben Henry:** [00:05:53] But yeah, not yet. Corn mazes aside, much of the fire marshal's job is to prevent fires. But they also get involved after a fire happens. Twelve fire investigators work for the fire marshal.

**Paul Parissi:** [00:06:06] So they're certified police officers and they're also certified firefighters.

**Ben Henry:** [00:06:09] Once the flames are put out, these investigators pick through what's left. They figure out what happened.

**Paul Parissi:** [00:06:15] One of the investigators typically will begin interviews and they will talk to the fire officials that were on the scene. They'll talk to law enforcement that's on the scene and begin to gather information as to who was in the building. Were there any criminal indicators? What were the sounds and sights and smells? Right. Right before the fire. And during the fire, was there anybody that might have had motive to set the fire? The other investigator may focus more on the physical property itself on the topic of investigations.

**Ben Henry:** [00:06:50] Let's talk about the state police.

**John Marasco:** [00:06:52] State police are tasked with motor vehicle enforcement keeping the roadways safe, as well as criminal investigations throughout the state as well.

**Ben Henry:** [00:07:00] Major John Marasco used to be a detective. Now he's an administrator. Local police departments handle most of your day to day cop stuff. State police patrol highways. That's where you've probably seen them.

**John Marasco:** [00:07:11] The catalysts really to the forming of the state police based on the research is that roadways were starting to grow. legislators' at that time looked at it and other states had formed state police organizations. I believe we were the 15th state police organization to be formed in the country. I also believe at that time that criminal investigations in many, many instances were done by private entities. The legislators at the time wanted to have some type of central organized governmental structure that could actually spearhead and streamline these investigations.

**Ben Henry:** [00:07:43] Just like fire investigators show up at the scene of a fire. State police investigators do the same thing at the scene of a crime. Local police departments tend to get first crack at a case and the law restricts when the state police can even get involved. But if the local police ask for help or in a major crime like a murder, state police show up. Altogether, the state employees about 330 troopers,.

**John Marasco:** [00:08:08] The uniform of the state police is a green shirt, a black cross strap that comes from one side of the belt to the other over the shoulder and military pink pants, which they look bronze or they look tan, black boots and a black belt and then a campaign hat, which has been compared to Smokey the Bear in the past.

**Ben Henry:** [00:08:28] I have one more stop on our tour of the Department of Safety, and that is the Division of Homeland Security. This is very different than the federal Department of Homeland Security. We do not do as much with counterterrorism here.

**Jenn Harper:** [00:08:41] So in this building that we're in on a day to day basis is called the Information Planning, Incident Planning and Operations Center. See, I live in a world of acronyms. Sometimes I can't remember what they stand for.

**Ben Henry:** [00:08:54] This is Jenn Harper. She's director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. This building she's describing epoch houses. Most of the Department of Safety is kind of a nerve center.

**Jenn Harper:** [00:09:06] People call 9-1-1 for emergencies, people call state police for emergencies, and people call the Department of Transportation that, hey, the road is closed. All those entities here in this building provide for us situational awareness. So we know that if there are a lot of 9-1-1 calls that come in consistently about flooded basements, we'll probably raising an eyebrow to say, OK, what's going on with all these flooded basements in like Manchester? Behind the scenes, that's what we're doing. So a disaster happens in a community. The community reaches out to us and says, hey, listen, we need some help. We are maxed out with all of our resources. And we need you know, it could be anything from sandbags to barricades to food, generators standing up shelters. What roads can we use to get resources into our community.

**Ben Henry:** [00:10:02] Employees of the Department of Safety don't use the word apocalypse, but I get the feeling they are ready for the apocalypse. The building that they're an epoch is brick and cement. It's wedged into a hillside. This is Central Command. Wanda Scott from 9-1-1 showed me around.

**Ben Henry:** [00:10:20] Is this the room? Yes. OK. So we're standing in kind of a foyer. Right. Right. Right outside the call center where people are 9-1-1 calls. You said this is no there's no windows in this room because this is super secure. It's safe. That's correct. Like, what could this room withstand?

**Wanda Scott:** [00:10:47] Well, that's a good question. I don't know.

**Ben Henry:** [00:10:49] Nuclear attack?

**Wanda Scott:** [00:10:50] Oh, I don't think so.

**Ben Henry:** [00:10:52] OK. But like, really bad storm.

**Wanda Scott:** [00:10:55] Yeah, sure. Sure. Absolutely. Take some pretty bad weather. Yeah. Yeah. Cool.

**Ben Henry:** [00:10:59] How many people are in there right now?

**Wanda Scott:** [00:11:01] There's probably about five or six here. And then we also have people answering in Laconia as well.

**Ben Henry:** [00:11:06] And so because phone calls in New Hampshire or private, I have to turn the microphone off and then we can go inside.

**Ben Henry:** [00:11:16] It kind of looks like any office cubicles and phones, though. Each desk has four monitors. One of them has a map of the caller's location. There are some special programs. One monitor just has a Google doc open. And this is where the call operators write down notes about the calls that they get. The reason for this is when something big happens, like a highway accident, lots of people call 9-1-1 at the same time. And each caller has one little piece of the puzzle. They know a little bit about what happened. The operators need to put the whole puzzle together. This Google document is where they do that. I talked to one 9-1-1 operator right before his shift. His name's Derek Corney. And on his I.D. card, he has a pin shaped like a stalk. What's the Stork Club?

**Derek Corney:** [00:12:05] The Stork Club is anybody that's delivered a baby on the phone like the whole process? Not, you know, she's in contractions and in the ambulance shows up, but she is in labor and the baby comes out and we get the scavenger hunt together. We get the towels and the safety pin and all the things, a shoelace to tie the umbilical cord off. My name's Derek Corney. I've been working at 9-1-1 for three years. Before that, I worked in restaurants my whole life.

**Ben Henry:** [00:12:38] Is there like a busiest day of the year?

**Derek Corney:** [00:12:43] Full moons are always crazy as much as you'd like to think. It's not it full moon, especially in the summertime when because the summertime is the busiest time. It's when everybody's doing stuff outside.

**Ben Henry:** [00:12:54] And you're not being superstitious here. You're just saying because it's brighter at night. More people are out and about.

**Derek Corney:** [00:13:00] I'm. I make no claim to know what the effect of the full moon is on people. But it is it is a thing.

**Ben Henry:** [00:13:10] Sometimes you're just on the line for like a while. Right. Is that what is that span of time like?

**Derek Corney:** [00:13:16] Depending on how serious the call is. There was one one call where there was a guy had a snowmobile accident last year and snowmobile like rolled over on top of him. And he was in like a little stream. So he was like in water. And the snowmobile is on top of them was obviously cold. I think it was January or something like that. And yeah, he was terrified. And we wound up being on the phone for, I think, over a half an hour before any help. Got there.

**Ben Henry:** [00:13:50] Derek said nine out of ten calls are not life or death situations, but you do get those calls when something really bad has happened. That's what makes this job hard. The department is constantly hiring for this position because call takers burnout really often.