

E-COMM WAGES: CREATING DISINCENTIVE WAGE COMPARISON IN BRIEF E-Comm Versus Local Comparators



INTRODUCTION

E-Comm Emergency Communications for British Columbia Inc. is the largest consolidated emergency communications centre in Canada, taking 9-1-1 calls for 99 per cent of the province as well as emergency and non-emergency calls for 33 police agencies and 40 fire departments, and providing the related mission critical Information Technology and support services.

E-Comm's 9-1-1 operators, call takers, and dispatchers are highly skilled individuals ensuring efficient and effective handling of calls according to countless standard operating procedures for each individual police department, fire department, or region. E-Comm's technology services professionals provide a variety of secure, mission-critical technology services that support E-Comm's technology systems as well as those systems of many public safety agencies, including multi-jurisdictional computer-aided dispatch systems, records management systems and electronic mapping services.

Despite the large scope, specialization, and complexity of their jobs, we have observed significant wage gaps when comparing the wages of Call Takers, Dispatchers, Information Technology, and support positions.

FINDINGS

Emergency Communications Operator 1 (Call Taker)

In 2021, an E-Comm Emergency Communications Operator 1 (call taker), at the entry level wage of \$26.86¹, earned \$3.60 less per hour than their entry-level colleagues doing work for one police agency a short drive away at Metro Vancouver Transit Police^{2,3}, versus 33 police agencies at E-Comm. This wage gap over a year of full-time work amounts to more than \$7,000. In Calgary, Alberta, the next closest metropolitan area emergency communications centre, they would find that first-year wages for an Emergency Communications Operator 1 were \$4.38 higher per hour⁴ with Calgary Police. This wage gap over a year of full-time work amounts to more than \$8,000. **Over a 35-year career, this disparity amounts to losses greater than one quarter of a million dollars per employee.**

	E-Comm Emergency	Calgary Police (**2020 rates)	Saanich Fire (2022 rates)	Surrey Fire (2022 rates)	Metro Vancouver Transit Police (2021*)
	Emergency	Emergency	N/A	N/A	Police Call Takers
1	\$30.41	\$34.79 (+4.38)			\$31.81 (+1.40)
2	\$31.62	\$37.85 (+6.23)			\$32.81 (+1.19)
3	\$32.97	\$41.41 (+8.44)			\$33.86 (+0.89)
4	\$34.33	\$43.76 (+9.43)			\$35.19 (+0.86)
5	\$35.77				\$36.57 (+0.80)

¹ 2019-2022 Collective Agreement between E-Comm Emergency Communications for British Columbia Incorporated and the CUPE 8911

² 2020 Agreement between Transit Security Management Limited (TSML) and Transit Police Professional Association (TPPA)

³ 2019-2022 Agreement between South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority (Translink) and COPE 378 (moveUP)

⁴ 2018-2021 Collective Agreement between City of Calgary and IBEW 254 Emergency Communications Officer

Emergency Communications Operator 2 (Dispatcher)

The wage discrepancies that begin when entering the workforce at E-Comm persist, and often become exacerbated, throughout the career trajectory. In the Lower Mainland, measuring E-Comm Emergency Communications Operator II wages at year four against the same position with the City of Surrey, a similar consolidated dispatch centre shows a wage differential of \$5.39 per hour more⁵ for Fire Radio Operator at the latter agency: \$38.79 per hour at E-Comm versus \$44.18 at the City of Surrey, over a year equalling a discrepancy of more than \$10,000.

On Vancouver Island, a short drive away from the E-Comm communications Centre located in Saanich, they would find fourth-year wages for Fire Alarm Dispatchers at the District of Saanich are \$8.93 higher per hour^{6,7} than for their Emergency Communications Operator 2 (dispatcher) E-Comm counterparts, over a year equalling a discrepancy of more than \$17,000. **Over a 35-year career, this disparity amounts to losses greater than \$600,000 per employee.**

	E-Comm Emergency Communi- cations (2022 rates)	Calgary Police (**2020 rates)	Saanich Fire (2022 rates)	Surrey Fire (2022 rates)	Metro Vancouver Transit Police (2021*)
	Emergency Communi- cations Operator 2	Emergency Communi- cations Operator – Dispatcher	Alarm Dispatcher	Radio Operator	Police Communi- cation Operator
1	\$34.33	\$35.83 (+1.50)	\$39.77 (+5.44)	\$31.58 (-2.75)	\$34.72 (+0.39)
2	\$35.77	\$38.99 (+3.22)	\$42.42 (+6.65)	\$33.84 (-1.93)	\$35.83 (+0.06)
3	\$37.26	\$42.65 (+5.39)	\$45.07 (+7.81)	\$39.75 (+2.49)	\$36.90 (-0.36)
4	\$38.79	\$45.07 (+6.28)	\$47.72 (+8.93)	\$44.18 (+5.39)	\$38.42 (-0.37)
5	\$40.43				\$39.94 (-0.49)

⁵ 2020-2022 Collective Agreement between City of Surrey and IAFF Local 1271

⁶ 2012-2019 Collective Agreement between District of Saanich and IAFF 967

⁷ 2021 Memorandum of Settlement between District of Saanich and IAFF 967

Service Desk Technician 2 (Technology Services)

Similar wage discrepancies exist in Technology Services, where the majority of E-Comm’s technology services are based. In the Lower Mainland for similar work with the City of Vancouver⁸ or the City of Burnaby⁹ at the year four rate, the E-Comm Service Desk Technician 2 wages are \$6.84 and \$8.64 behind market. Over a year, this equates to a wage gap of more than \$14,000 and \$18,000, respectively. **Over a 35-year career, this disparity amounts to losses of approximately a half a million dollars per employee.**

	E-Comm Emergency Communications (2022 rates)	City of Burnaby (2019 rates ^{***})	City of Vancouver (2019 rates ^{***})
	Service Desk Technician 2	RCMP Computer Systems Specialist (Burnaby)	Desktop Support Specialist (Vancouver)
1	\$32.03	\$39.56 (+\$7.53)	\$37.97 (+\$5.94)
2	\$33.35	\$41.29 (+\$7.94)	\$39.56 (+\$6.21)
3	\$34.74	\$43.04 (+\$8.30)	\$41.29 (+\$6.55)
4	\$36.19	\$44.83 (+\$8.64)	\$43.04 (+\$6.84)
5	\$37.68	\$46.75 (+\$9.07)	\$44.83 (+\$7.15)

CONCLUSION

E-Comm workers can earn a better—sometimes significantly better—wage doing close to the same work, at agencies that are geographically accessible to them. This has created a situation in which chronic short-staffing at E-Comm will become inevitable: communities that pay good living wages for this stressful but critically important work will be well-served, while other communities will not. Such a disparity is extremely problematic in the context of vital service provision. A well-funded service model that exemplifies the highest quality service and attracts the best people may not be possible unless these structural inequities in wages are addressed. By failing to do so, E-Comm is undermining its own potential as a leading emergency communications service provider.

⁸ 2016-2019 Collective Agreement between City of Vancouver and CUPE Local 15 (Vancouver Municipal, Education and Community Workers)

⁹ 2016-2019 Collective Agreement between City of Burnaby and CUPE Local 23 (Inside Workers’ Division)