



## CITY OF ATLANTA

City Auditor's Office  
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## ***Performance Audit:***

### **Police Computer Aided Dispatch Data Reliability**

#### ***Why We Did This Audit***

The Atlanta Police Department has a high public profile and comprises about 30% of the general fund's budget. Vacancies and attrition have hindered the department's ability to reach its goal of 2,000 officers. Understaffing may affect its timely response to calls for service. We plan to compare available staff to the calls for service workload and this audit is the first part of that review. We are required by Government Auditing Standards to assess the reliability of data used as evidence.

#### ***What We Recommended***

Our recommendations are intended to increase the usability of CAD data for the department.

- The chief information officer should direct Northrop Grumman to investigate why there are gaps in the incident numbers, determine whether records are missing, and correct report programming errors.
- The chief of police should communicate to officers and dispatchers the importance of recording officer arrival times and monitor when and why times are not recorded.
- The chief of police and the chief information officer should work together to strengthen in-house expertise on their systems.

For more information regarding this report, please contact Eric Palmer at 404.330.6455 or [epalmer@atlantaga.gov](mailto:epalmer@atlantaga.gov).

#### ***What We Found***

While we found no significant logical inconsistencies within the data fields we tested, unexplained gaps in incident numbers call into question whether the computer aided dispatch (CAD) system records are complete. CAD system incident numbers include a consecutive number sequence that resets at the end of the day. Unexplained gaps occur in 67 of the 556 days we examined. Our detailed review of six of these days found multiple gaps of between one and more than one hundred consecutive incident numbers. While the total number of potentially missing records is a very small percentage of the 1.2 million records we analyzed, we are concerned because the contractor tasked with maintaining the system provided no reasonable explanation for why incident numbers would be skipped, the contractor prevented us from independently reviewing system documentation that could shed light on the problem, and a 2004 consultant's report also found discrepancies in calls for service data.

We identified problems with missing fields and the logic used to create response time reports that could limit their accuracy. The CAD data used to generate the June 2007 reports on response times excluded nearly 20% of 911 calls. The exclusion of these records could result in over- or understating actual response times and therefore limits the usefulness of the reports for making deployment decisions.

Finally, the department's limited system expertise and reliance on the contractor for information about the system restrict its use as a management tool. Department staff told us that they're not sure what the data reports or different fields really mean. Staff told us they rely on relatively few reports that could be used for analysis and to support management decisions. Our review of available reports show none that are focused on how resources are used, such as number of officers on duty, time committed to answering calls for service, or time out of service on particular types of calls.