
Sound Practice No.8

5-MINUTE QUICK RESPONSE TIME RESCUE 161 IN MARIKINA CITY¹

Overview

An emergency is a race against time.

All local governments have ambulances, firetrucks, and police cars equipped with sirens and blinkers to get anywhere fast in their area of jurisdiction for emergency calls. Marikina is no different, except for the signs posted on all of its emergency vehicles prescribing the self-imposed **5-minute response time** along with the instruction:

<p>If this unit fails to reach you within 5 minutes upon call for assistance, report to Mayor MCF, call tel. 646-1634.</p>

When this program was launched in 1997 by then Mayor Bayani Fernando, he said: *Sa ating karanasan, kung atrasado ang dating, mamatay man ang pulis, bumbero, o paramedics sa paglilingkod ay walang ibig sabihin sa tao. Sa kabilang banda, kung dumating sa oras kahit hindi marunong bumaril ang pulis o pumatay ng sunog ang bumbero o gumamot ang paramedics ay nasisiyahan pa rin ang tao.* (In our experience, if the police or fireman o paramedic arrived late in the emergency situation, even if anyone of them dies in the line of duty, this will not mean anything to the people. While if these people came to the rescue on time, even if the police could not fire his gun, or the fireman couldn't stop at all the fire, or the paramedic couldn't cure his patient, people will still be satisfied.)

“These are people’s perceptions. So it is necessary that we have to always look good, even if we simply act it out, in order to maintain people’s faith in government which is the first requirement to make anything work,” former Mayor Fernando continued.

Five (5) minutes or fifteen (15) minutes response-time depends on the environment and one’s resources. Within reasonable limits, an optimum time is set as an acceptable measure of service.

¹ This practice has been prepared and written by Julie Borje and her team in Marikina

Significant Background Information

Public safety is a primordial responsibility of the government. To this task, the local government of Marikina has established a line unit of the *Oplan Ligtas Bayan* (Operation Save the Town) named **Rescue 161** under the umbrella of the Marikina Disaster Coordinating Council. It started out as a special project and brainchild of then Mayor Bayani Fernando, whose primary purpose was to serve as a disaster response unit and emergency medical services for the city's constituents.

In 1992, the concept of Marikina Rescue 161 was formulated. It was primarily thought to provide emergency medical services, and at the same, served as the communication base to receive calls from the constituents on a 24-hour basis. In the early part of 1993, qualified personnel were recruited and trained for two months, after which an ambulance suited for the unit's purpose was procured by the local government. It was in May 1993, Rescue 161 became fully operational.

Through the years, the unit has slowly evolved into a well-equipped and efficient provider of disaster response and relief operations and emergency medical service to the whole community.

It was in 1997 that the project **5-minute Quick Response Time** was launched and strictly adhered to by the medical team of Rescue 161, Police, and Fire Department. The number **161** has been made the city's emergency number. For any call requiring the assistance of police, fire, or medical, it is the number to be dialed.



To ensure the facilitation of calls to any of the emergency units, some improvements were undertaken: (1) one communication base was established where representatives of the three offices (police, fire, and medical) stay to receive and disseminate emergency calls to responding units; (2) two other satellite public safety stations were set up, one in the southern section of the city and the other in the northern section to make sure that responding unit can reach their destination within 5 minutes (the main office is in the central area, close to the City Hall); (3) the removal of all humps on all the streets of the city with the

exception of those near schools to ensure that there are no obstructions along the road; (4) system of reporting and monitoring is properly established: responding units are required to report via handheld radio to the communication base all actions being made in the emergency situation, including their time of arrival at the site, and others; (5) through this system, all reports are properly documented for monitoring purpose and future references.



Since medical emergency is one of the services provided and because Rescue 161 is mostly composed of paramedics, one program was added to ensure effectiveness and this is *Doktor sa Hatinggabi* (Midnight Doctor). Under this program, emergency medical assistance requiring a physician's attention, is assured of the presence of one. A physician is made available seven days a

week from 9pm to 5am of the following day.

By 1999, the city government of Marikina received a “Galing-Pook” award for the project **5-minute Quick Response Time**. *Galing-Pook* is a national recognition given by the Asian Institute of Management (AIM), Ford Foundation, and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to local government units whose program passed their criteria and standards of innovation and excellence.

Marikina gets another award

The prestigious Gawad Galing Pook organized by the Asian Institute of Management, Local Government Academy and Ford Foundation has once again awarded another program of the city of Marikina as one of this year's Galing Pook in ceremonies that took place at Malacañang.

The 5-minute Quick Response Time Program of Marikina was cited as among the Top 20 of said national awards. This program has set a 5-minute parameter for all emergency units of the city, be it the Fire Department, the police Department and the paramedical service of Rescue 161. These units, upon call for assistance, have to respond within a self-imposed time for 5 minutes anywhere in the city.

In an interview with Marikina Mayor Bayani Fernando, he said that “all local governments possess ambulances, firetrucks and police cars complete with sirens and blinkers, but our question before was – how can we effectively meet the needs of our community, especially in times of emergency? We thought that emergency is a race against time, so why not impose a 5-minute quick response time. It could be best bet!”


The mayor added that to ensure this is strictly followed, a sign was posted on all our emergency vehicles, which reads: “If this unit fails to reach you within five minutes upon call for assistance, report to mayor BF, call tel. 6446-11634.” All calls for assistance are timed and logged, plus they are aired over the 2-way radio transmission of the city hall to make known to everyone. Likewise, regular reports are submitted and checked versus reports received from the people.



GAWAD GALING POOK AWARDS. Marikina City Mayor Bayani Fernando (right) receives the 'Gawad Galing Pook' award for Marikina City's Hall of Fame program 'Rescue 161' from Interior and Local Government Secretary Ronaldo Puno and presidential spokesman Jerry Barican. Looking on are Dean Jesus G. Gallegos Jr. of the Asian Institute of Management, Dean Levidina Cariño of the National College of Public Administration and Governance, and Rescue 161 Chief Domingo de la Paz. (Ali Vicoy)

PEOPLES
Tonight

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GALING POOK AWARDEE — Local Government Secretary Ronaldo V. Puno and Presidential Spokesman Jerry Barlean, representing President Estrada, award to Marikina Mayor Bayani F. Fernando and Rescue 161 Chief Domingo de la Paz the 1999 Gawad Galang Pook for Marikina's Five-Minute Quick Response Time Program. The awarding ceremonies were held yesterday at Malacanang's Ceremonial Hall. Looking on are Dr. Ledevina V. Carino, dean of the UP College of Public Administration and Governance; and Dr. Jesus C. Gallegos Jr. (extreme left) dean of the Asian Institute of Management.

LIFTING DAILY INQUIRER

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5-MINUTE RESPONSE

Rescue 161 saves lives in Marikina

BY VOLT CONTRERAS

JOCELYN Dapadap will turn a year old this Nov. 4. She was born while her mother was still in the ambulance en route to the hospital.

Soon she will learn that her impatient entry into the world has been well documented, timed and later evaluated, as one of the shining moments of Marikina City's Rescue 161 in pursuit of a goal dubbed the "5-Minute Quick Response Time."

On the day she was born, the 161 ambulance arrived to take her mother Maritess, 19, then already in labor, just two minutes after her frantic household in Barangay Tanong dialled the three-digit hotline for help at 4:10 a.m.

It was an experience the Dapadaps had in common with "Jane," a 19-year-old who tried to kill herself by drinking insecticide; Reginald Reyes, 23, burn patient; Pablito Sayson, 62, hypertension sufferer.

The list could go on. This year, after performing over 8,000 feats of real-life heroism, Marikina's home-grown team of paramedics, radio operators and drivers is being honored as the country's best public, civilian emergency response unit.

Rescue 161 has been counted among this year's awardees of the Gawad Galang Pook, a citation which in the post-EDSA period had become the yardstick of success in local government projects.

President Estrada will be handing out the awards to Rescue 161 and nine other Galang Pook awardee-projects in ceremonies to be held in Malacañang this July 16.

Rescue 161 is actually the fifth project

of the Marikina City government to bag a GOP award, which is given out annually since 1993 by the Asian Institute of Management and the Department of Interior and Local Government, under the sponsorship of the Ford Foundation of the United States.

"The honor will be shared by our 32 all-civilian members, most of whom are just casual employees of the city government, who were trained in first aid and other basic rescue operations," said Rodrigo Caguinquin, 161 assistant chief.

Caguinquin explained that though 161 had been operational since May 1993, its "5-Minute Quick Response" undertaking was launched only in 1997.

"It is for this '5-Minute' that we won the Galang Pook," he proudly noted. "This made us different from other emergency teams maintained by local governments. I think even Rescue 911 of the US does not have anything like it."

Credit must also be due, he said, to the Marikina police and fire departments whom the team tapped for assistance in most of their successful under-five-minute responses.

From a single ambulance in 1993, 161 now operates six units on call 24 hours a day. It keeps its headquarters at City Hall, a substation at the Industrial Valley Complex to better cover the city's District I and another in Barangay Concepcion I to focus on District II.

This expanding fleet of mobile units and strategic deployment of personnel "enabled us to meet our 'five-minute' target in almost all cases we had encountered," said Caguinquin.

But given the condition of Metro Manila streets, the traffic congestion and

the potholes, how on earth were the 161 squads still able to consistently beat the clock?

Caguinquin claimed that road problems plaguing the metropolis are not that bad in Marikina. Hence, short, urgent trips within the city can be very swift and smooth. "Our ambulances take advantage of the light traffic volume and our well-paved streets."

Rescue 161's achievement is doubly significant for Marikina, considered a veteran in the Galang Pook roster, said Idena Panganiban, executive director of the Local Government Academy, training arm of the DILG in charge of the awards.

The city posted another victory this year although it had already entered the Galang Pook "Hall of Fame" in 1998, she said. To enter the Hall of Fame, a local government must win the award thrice.

Yet the city, under Mayor Bayani Fernando had already won in three years since the awards were launched.

The first five awards were for the following projects: Barangay Talyer (communal repair shops) and "Squatter-Free Marikina" massive relocation and housing program, 1997-98; Politika sa Bangketa (clearing all sidewalks of traffic obstructions), 1996-97; Save Marikina River project, 1994-95.

Gawad Pook gives recognition and cash incentives to local government projects which had endured and prospered with little or zero dependence on national agencies.

Its underlying mission is to advance "decentralization," the ideal of having local governments determined and creative enough to provide basic public services on their own, Panganiban said.

Some Other Details

The **5-minute Quick Response Time** can be categorized as a management project of the local government. It was implemented to guarantee that people’s emergency needs will be attended to within five (5) minutes upon call for assistance anywhere in Marikina. It is certainly intended to make better the efficiency and effectiveness of government service delivery. As such, it is the city government that sustains the operation of the project.

Before nobody took particular notice of the response time of operatives involved in the delivery of emergency services---medical, fire, and police assistance. The police had the ugly reputation of arriving half a day late at the crime scene. Firemen and medical emergency would always blame the traffic for their late arrival resulting in the loss or substantial damage to lives and properties and death to patients needing emergency medical attention.

Several years ago, the average response time of police, firemen, and medical emergency were as follows:

Police	20-30 minutes
Firemen	10-15 minutes
Medical emergency	10 minutes

As stated earlier, the **5-minute Quick Response Time** was conceptualized as a project confined to Rescue 161. Rescue 161 only referred to the emergency medical team, until the policy of **5-minute Quick Response Time** was launched that Rescue 161 signified the composite teams of police, fire, emergency medical group, and even the Office for Public Safety and Security.

With the launching of this project, the entire citizenry of Marikina benefited because they are assured of immediate response and assistance from the local government in cases of emergency. The cityfolks even learned to monitor the arrival of the local government’s emergency vehicle. They learned also to report to the City Hall, or directly to the Office of the Mayor, any late response. Thus, the project became a continuing policy and performance measurement of all emergency units of the city government.



Relevance to Megacities

This project is not novel, neither difficult to be replicated by other institutions. The United States' 911 became popular for it is able to respond to emergency cases within a period of 15 minutes. It shows, therefore, how important and critical the response time made to any given emergency situation. Similarly, Marikina's Rescue 161's 5-minute response time gained a reputation such that it was copied by another local government here in the Philippines---the Bataan City Government, which is located in the central section of the Luzon Island. As such, this type of project would not meet problems with regard to applicability and expandability.

It is believed that the project has been conceptualized and implemented for the reason that the local government of Marikina has fully recognized the ultimate aim of everything which government does, which is peace and order, to include the security of lives and properties and that the best measure of the effectivity of emergency services is **response time**.

In terms of concrete impact, the police, in many instances, has been able to foil crimes such as simple altercations that would have otherwise resulted in fatalities or at the very least physical injuries. Marikina's lowest crime rate in eastern Metro Manila, with its local PNP recording high 93% crime solution efficiency, could be largely attributed to the program. Our paramedics have saved the lives of a number of patients, especially those who suffered heart attacks. It bears no emphasis that in case of severe heart attack time element is so crucial a factor because 1 or 2 minutes delay in medical response would cost the life of a patient. In a number of incidents, timely arrival of firemen has abated the spread of fire that would have otherwise been difficult to contain if the response came beyond five (5) minutes.

Today, the average response time of operatives are:

Police	3 minutes
Firemen	4 minutes
Medical emergency	3.20 minutes

and this is guaranteed anywhere in Marikina anytime of the day. The city government sustains well the program not only for the usual emergency situations people encounter on a daily basis, but more so, it wants to assure its constituents that even in times of grave calamities, they have a better chance of survival.

Knowledge Base Coding Reference:

Name of the Practice: 5-Minute Quick Response Time: Rescue 161 In Marikina City

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