



Use 9-1-1 to report an emergency: a crime in progress, a fire or when you need an ambulance. Your call is answered at the communications center by a Public Safety Dispatcher (PSD). When the call is answered, your address and telephone number are automatically displayed to the PSD.

Do not program 9-1-1 into your auto-dial telephone. You won't forget the number, and programming the number invites accidental dialing of the number. Also, please do not dial 9-1-1 to "test" your phone or the system. This needlessly burdens the dispatchers and system with non-emergency calls.

If you dial 9-1-1 accidentally, do *not* hang up. If a PSD receives a hang-up call, he/she will try to call you back. If no one answers, or if an answering machine picks up, we are required to send a police officer to investigate. This could tie up officers for actual emergencies.

Use 9-1-1 only to report an emergency!

When the PSD answers your 9-1-1 call, briefly describe the emergency you are reporting. For example, "I'm reporting an auto fire," or "I'm reporting an unconscious person," or "I'm reporting a burglary."

Let the PSD ask you questions—they have been trained to ask questions that will help prioritize the incident, locate it and speed an appropriate response. Your answers should be brief and responsive. Remain calm and speak clearly. In some cases, the dispatcher will keep you on the line while the emergency units are responding to ask additional questions or to obtain on-going information.

Be patient as the PSD asks you questions. If you are reporting an emergency, most likely police officers or firefighters are being dispatched by other PSDs while you are still on the line.

Be prepared to describe the persons or vehicles involved in any incident. For persons, this includes the race, sex, age, height and weight, color of hair, description of clothing, and presence of a hat, glasses or facial hair. For vehicles, this includes the color, year, make, model and type of vehicle. If the vehicle is parked, the dispatcher will ask which direction it's facing. If the vehicle is moving or has left, the dispatcher will ask which way it is going.

Listen to the dispatcher's instructions for assistance if you are in danger. The dispatcher may tell you to leave the building, secure yourself in a room or take other action to protect yourself. Don't hang up until the PSD tells you to. Follow any instructions the dispatcher gives you, such as meeting the officers at the door, or flagging down the firefighters at the curb.

Do's and Don'ts of 9-1-1

When the 9-1-1 number was inaugurated in Haleyville (Ala.) as the result of an AT&T proposal, it was intended as an easily-remember, no-coin method of reaching the correct law enforcement, fire and EMS agencies. Today, officials estimate that over 270,000 calls are made to 9-1-1 each day in the United States.

A 9-1-1 system is considered either Basic or Enhanced. A Basic 9-1-1 system provides three-digit dialing, no-coin from pay telephones, and intelligent routing to the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) that handles the area where the phone is located. An Enhanced 9-1-1 system adds the ability to display the caller's address and telephone number at the PSAP for the dispatcher's reference. Some 9-1-1 systems also have the ability to automatically ring-back the caller on hang-up, to lock a line open for tracing, or to transfer callers to other agencies or telephone numbers with a single button.

If you dial 9-1-1 in error, do not hang up the telephone. Instead, stay on the line and explain to the dispatcher that you dialed by mistake and that you do not have an emergency. If you hang up, a dispatcher will call back to confirm that there is no emergency. If you don't answer, a police officer or deputy must be dispatched to confirm that you are OK. This will needlessly take resources away from genuine emergencies.

Calls to 9-1-1 calls are answered immediately by a dispatcher if one is available. However, if all call-takers are busy on other calls, your 9-1-1 call might be answered by a recording, and then automatically routed to the first available call-taker. If you reach a recording, do not hang up and then call back. Stay on the line and your call will be answered in order. If you hang up and call back, your call will be delayed because you will be placed back at the end of the line of waiting calls.

Be prepared to describe your location and the location of the emergency. Although an Enhanced 9-1-1 system will display your telephone number and location, the dispatcher must confirm the displayed address or may ask you for more specific location information about the victim or suspects. If you are a cellular caller, your telephone number and location will not be displayed for the dispatcher's reference. You must be able to describe your location so emergency units can respond. Be aware of your current city or town, address, highway and direction, nearby cross-streets or interchanges, or other geographic points of reference.

Be patient as the dispatcher asks you questions. While you are answering the dispatcher's questions, he/she is entering or writing down the information. If you are reporting an emergency, most likely a response is being made while you are still on the line with the dispatcher.

Listen to the dispatcher's instructions for assistance if you are in danger yourself. The dispatcher may tell you to leave the building, secure yourself in a room or take other action to protect yourself. Don't hang up until the call-taker tells you to. Follow any instructions the dispatcher gives you, such as meeting the officers at the door, or flagging down the firefighters at the curb. If you are able and have training, apply first aid to any patients who need it. Give the victim reassurance that help is on the way. Secure any dogs or other pets that may interfere with the emergency response. Gather any medications the patient is taking and which the medical crew will need to take with the patient.

Here's How To Reach Us

Do's and Don'ts of 9-1-1

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In general, 9-1-1 is an emergency number for any police, fire or medical incident. Some jurisdictions allow citizens to dial 9-1-1 for any type of police, fire or medical situation. In some cities, this has resulted in a flood of 9-1-1 calls that agencies cannot promptly receive, answer or respond to.

Do not program 9-1-1 into your auto-dial telephone. You won't forget the number, and programming the number invites accidental dialing of the number. Also, please do not dial 9-1-1 to "test" your phone or the system. This needlessly burdens the dispatchers and system with non-emergency calls.

Dial 9-1-1 only for an emergency. An emergency is any serious medical problem (chest pain, seizure, bleeding), any type of fire (business, car, building), or any life-threatening situation (fights, person with weapons, etc.). You can also use 9-1-1 to report crimes in progress, whether or not a life is threatened.

Do not dial 9-1-1 for a non-emergency. Instead, dial the agency's listed 7-digit non-emergency telephone number. A non-emergency incident is a property damage accident, or a "cold" break-in to a vehicle, theft of property or vandalism. You should also use the non-emergency telephone number for intoxicated persons who are not disorderly, or cars blocking the street or alley.

If you dial 9-1-1 in error, do not hang up the telephone. Instead, stay on the line and explain to the dispatcher that you dialed by mistake and that you do not have an emergency. If you hang up, a dispatcher will call back to confirm that there is no emergency. If you don't answer, a police officer or deputy must be dispatched to confirm that you are OK. This will needlessly take resources away from genuine emergencies.

Calls to 9-1-1 calls are answered immediately by a dispatcher if one is available. However, if all call-takers are busy on other calls, the 9-1-1 call may be answered by a recording, and then automatically routed to the first available call-taker. If you reach a recording, do not hang up and then call back. Stay on the line and your call will be answered in order. If you hang up and call back, your call will be delayed because you will be placed back at the end of the line of waiting calls.

When the dispatcher answers, briefly describe the type of incident you are reporting. For example, "I'm reporting an auto fire," or "I'm reporting an unconscious person," or "I'm reporting a shoplifter." Then stay on the line with the dispatcher—do not hang up until the dispatcher tells you to. In some cases, the dispatcher will keep you on the line while the emergency units are responding to ask additional questions or to obtain on-going information.

Let the call-taker ask you questions—they have been trained to ask questions that will help prioritize the incident, locate it and speed an appropriate response. Your answers should be brief and responsive. Remain calm and speak clearly. If you are not in a position to give full answers to the call-taker (the suspect is nearby), stay on the phone and the dispatcher will ask you questions that can be answered “yes” or “no.”

Be prepared to describe your location and the location of the emergency. Although an Enhanced 9-1-1 system will display your telephone number and location, the dispatcher must confirm the displayed address or may ask you for more specific location information about the victim or suspects.

If you are a cellular caller, your telephone number and location will not be displayed for the dispatcher's reference. You must be able to describe your location so emergency units can respond. Be aware of your current city or town, address, highway and direction, nearby cross-streets or interchanges, or other geographic points of reference.

Cellular 9-1-1 calls are frequently routed to a central PSAP that could be many miles from your location. Be prepared to give the dispatcher your complete location---city or town, address or location, inside or outside, what floor or room, etc.

Be prepared to describe the persons involved in any incident. This includes their race, sex, age, height and weight, color of hair, description of clothing, and presence of a hat, glasses or facial hair.

Be prepared to describe any vehicles involved in the incident. This includes the color, year, make, model and type of vehicle (sedan, pick-up, sport utility, van, tanker truck, flatbed, etc.). If the vehicle is parked the dispatcher will need to know the direction it's facing. If the vehicle is moving or has left, the dispatcher will need to know the last direction.

Be patient as the dispatcher asks you questions. While you are answering the dispatcher's questions, he / she is entering or writing down the information. If you are reporting an emergency, most likely a response is being made while you are still on the line with the dispatcher.

Listen to the dispatcher's instructions for assistance if you are in danger yourself. The dispatcher may tell you to leave the building, secure yourself in a room or take other action to protect yourself.

Don't hang up until the call-taker tells you to. Follow any instructions the dispatcher gives you, such as meeting the officers at the door, or flagging down the firefighters at the curb.

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