

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

When the 9-1-1 number was inaugurated in Haleyville (Ala.) in 1968 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.

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 dialed 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, you may have to wait for the next dispatcher. 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."



Dial 9-1-1

- To stop a crime
- To report a fire
- To save a life



For more information
about our communications
center, 9-1-1 or any of the
services that we provide,
feel free to contact us.



9-1-1

The Do's
and
Don'ts
of
Our Emergency
Telephone Number