

I Am Not "911"!

No, I am not 911!

I am a public safety dispatcher who fields emergency and non-emergency calls from the public. I dispatch law enforcement, fire or emergency medical help, and coordinate the activity of field units by radio. I also handle many other duties to assist the public and members of the public safety agencies for whom I work.

"911" is the telephone number that you dial when you have a life-threatening emergency, and you need help quickly. The number was selected to allow quick dialing and direct routing to the nearest public safety communications center. It's maintained by the local telephone company and consists of computers and switching gear to accept your call, route it to my communications center and, in most cases, display your address and telephone number.

I am a person. 911 is equipment. Please don't use the term "911" when you intend to refer to me. No one likes to be referred to as a piece of equipment. For example, don't say, "I talked to 911 and they said...." Instead, say that you, "dialed 911 and talked to the dispatcher." That makes me feel more like a valuable person.

And please don't use "911" to encompass everything that I do. Handling 911 calls is a critical part of my job, but it's just one small portion of the many tasks that I perform.

The majority of the calls I handle are non-emergencies. People call with parking problems, barking dogs, questions about the law, and just advice on how to handle an everyday life situation. I help track all the activity performed by the officers, deputies, firefighters and EMS personnel by writing logs or entering information into computers. I make telephone calls for tow trucks, taxis and assistance from alarm companies. I coordinate responses when our jurisdiction needs help from other agencies, including the state police, county sheriff, transit and university police, the FBI or Coast Guard. At some agencies, I may also greet visitors at the police department's front counter, or assist in booking prisoners into the jail.

As you can tell, there are literally scores of tasks that a public safety dispatcher performs. It's not all "911."

So, call 911 if you have an emergency. But please don't call *me* "911." I'm a public safety dispatcher.

Thank you.