

How Does 9-1-1 Work?

How Does My Call Get to 9-1-1?

When you call from a phone installed at a residence, business or a pay phone, the phone number of the phone determines which 9-1-1 center you reach. Each 9-1-1 center or Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) has an enormous list of phone numbers that are designated to come to that center. All of these numbers have a special secondary number on file with the phone company that directs your call to the correct 9-1-1 center for your area.

If you call from a cell phone the procedure is slightly different. Cell phones transmit to the nearest cellular tower and from there to the closest 9-1-1 center. The 9-1-1 center is determined by the location of the cell tower. Sometimes if you are close to a county or state border, you might get the wrong 9-1-1 center. However, the employees there will direct your call to the correct center to get the help you need.

In some locations responses for various types of calls may come from more than one jurisdiction. In those cases you might speak to more than one dispatcher, as each communications center involved gathers the information they need.

If you are hearing or speech impaired, Washington County **E9-1-1** is equipped with a Text Telephone (TTY) device to allow communication through your TTY device.

If you do not speak English, we will contact the Language Line to provide an interpreter. It helps us if you are able to tell us the name of the language you speak in English, so we can tell the Language Line which interpreter to choose.

Once you reach 9-1-1, the dispatcher will ask some questions. If you do not have an emergency, the dispatcher will refer you to the non-emergency number, (850)638-6111. Some of these calls go elsewhere through the non-emergency phone tree, but most are answered by the 9-1-1 dispatchers. The reason for getting you off the 9-1-1 line is twofold. One, we are trying to send help to the emergencies first, and two, we only have so many 9-1-1 telephone trunks. We want to keep those lines open for emergency calls. If you do have an emergency, the dispatcher will ask you questions to determine who to send. Some of these questions will be:

- **Where are you?** There are ambulances, fire trucks and police officers all over Washington County. We want to send the ones who are closest and can provide the quickest and most appropriate help. We really want an exact address, but sometimes you won't know that. We will ask for cross streets, what kind of building it is, what color is it and other questions to help us find you as quickly as possible.
- **What is going on now?** We will ask specific questions related to the situation. Sometimes responders may need special equipment, and not all vehicles carry the same kind of stuff. We want to send you the right help.

While we ask the questions, other dispatchers can also see the information and send help to you while we are still talking to you on the phone. **Answering questions does not delay response.** We will often keep you on the phone and obtain more information to give the responders. For example, it often helps the paramedics on the ambulance to know what kind of medication the patient takes every day. The patient might be having a breathing problem that is unrelated to the medication, but that information will improve the quality of care the paramedics can provide.