



What Happens When You Call 911

When you call 911, a call-taker will answer the phone and say "911, what's your location?". Ideally, you should tell the call-taker your location first then what the emergency is, for example:

- "My house is on fire!"
- "There's someone breaking into my home!"
- "There's a car accident at".

The best and fastest way to get a response to your emergency is to patiently answer all the questions the call-taker asks you. We understand that it can be difficult to be patient when you're terrified, but if you can remain as calm as possible and answer questions clearly, things will go much faster. When seconds count, you don't want to waste any time repeating yourself, or screaming while the call-taker tries to calm you down.

It may seem that we are wasting time asking silly questions, but what you don't know is that units may already be enroute to your location. We save the officers/deputies precious time at the scene by asking all these questions while they are enroute, then the information is relayed to them over their mobile data terminals. (Most law enforcement units have computer terminals in their cars) Also, it may seem that we ask questions that are irrelevant or obvious, but we follow a set pattern of questions that have been proven to be important. At every call, the call-taker has a fill-in-the-blank screen on his computer that he follows. The screen includes the location of the incident, the name, address, and phone number of the reporting party, space for an explanation of the problem, and a space for the call type.

The call explanation is kept as brief as possible while relaying pertinent information that the officers or fire teams will need to know. Common questions are where the responsible party is, or his/her direction of travel and how long ago he/she left; clothing descriptions of the responsible party, what weapons were involved, descriptions of vehicles involved, etc. The call-taker may also ask you for a clothing description of you or other victims or innocent bystanders at the scene. This is so that the officers know in advance that you are the victim and not the responsible party.

Another crucial piece of information is the location of the incident. Even though we frequently have your address relayed to us over our Enhanced 911 screens, we always verify with you that the location is correct. Computers are not always correct, and the location of the incident may be behind your house, at a neighbor's house, or in a field without an exact address. We need to know exactly where to go in order to send the units directly to the correct location.

Your phone number is also verified so that if necessary, we can call you back for more information. Currently, cell phones do not relay their number or location over our Enhanced 911 system, so if you call on one, be prepared to tell us your number. (Cellular companies are currently working on the technology to make their phones work with our Enhanced 911.)



If you called 911 by mistake, don't just hang up, tell the call-taker that you misdialed. All 911 hang-ups are called back, and if we cannot make contact with you again, we will dispatch an officer to the location showing in the Enhanced 911 screen. We do this because occasionally (for example in hostage situations or domestic violence cases) a victim tries to call for help but is interrupted, and his/her life is in danger unless they drop the phone and/or run and hide. However, do not call and hang up just to get a response because you know we will dispatch to you. Except in the cases just mentioned, you will get faster response if you stay on the phone to relay the pertinent information to us.

So the important things to remember when reporting any incident to 911 is:

- Try not to panic, and if you can't help it then at least try to speak clearly
- Answer the call-taker's questions patiently and completely
- Understand that there is a reason for every question asked
- Never hang up on 911!

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