

Making a 9-1-1 Call From Your Cell Phone

Frequently Asked Questions

Information provided by the National Emergency Number Association, 2008

Q: Can I call 9-1-1 on my cell phone and is there a cost involved?

A: Yes, you can call 9-1-1 on your cell phone. However, be prepared to give the 9-1-1 calltaker information about your location, because it is not like calling 9-1-1 on your home phone. It is free to call 9-1-1 on your cell phone.

Q: Does the 9-1-1 calltaker know my location?

A: Assume the 9-1-1 calltaker does **not** know your location. Even if your cell phone is able to provide location information, the chances are you will need to provide the 9-1-1 calltaker with additional location information. Remember, the approximate location the 9-1-1 center receives could be as large as 3 football fields or more. Be prepared to give specific directions to your location.

Q: What if I don't know my location when I call 9-1-1?

A: Look for landmarks, large buildings, street signs or paperwork nearby that may contain address information. Think back to the main street or highway you were near when your emergency occurred. If others are around, ask them where you are. *Do not depend on your cell phone to tell 9-1-1 where you are!*

Q: Does the 9-1-1 calltaker know my phone number when I call 9-1-1 on a cell phone?

A: Maybe or maybe not, depending upon your cell phone and the technology available within the 9-1-1 center your 9-1-1 call connects with. The safest way to approach the problem is to assume that the 9-1-1 calltaker will **not** know your phone number and be prepared to provide them with that information.

Q: Why is the 911 calltaker asking me so many questions?

A: Seconds save lives. The more questions 9-1-1 calltakers ask, the more information they can pass on to the emergency personnel responding to your 9-1-1 call. This information allows the emergency personnel to more accurately prepare. In addition, when dealing with medical calls many 9-1-1 calltakers are trained to give emergency pre-arrival instructions. These instructions start the emergency response to the situation immediately.

Q: While the 911 calltaker is speaking to me is help being sent?

A: Once the basic information and reason for the 9-1-1 call is obtained, the 9-1-1 calltaker stays on the line with the caller and sends information to a Police, Fire, or EMS dispatcher. That person then dispatches, or sends, the appropriate help to the 9-1-1 caller. In many cases, the 9-1-1 calltaker will continue to ask questions, give emergency response information and pass on situation updates to the responding personnel until help arrives at the scene.

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Q: Why does the dispatcher transfer my call to another agency?

A: Your call to 9-1-1 may need to be transferred to another agency because cell phone calls are sent to a 9-1-1 answering point based on cell radio coverage. Cell coverage areas don't always match political boundaries, so most calls are routed to a 9-1-1 answering point that serves the majority of the area. Your call *may* need to be transferred to the appropriate agency for the area.

Q: Why does the calltaker transfer my call to another person sometimes?

A: Each 9-1-1 center is unique. Some 9-1-1 personnel are trained to take any 9-1-1 call that comes to them. Others are only trained to take police, fire or medical related calls. Be assured that if a 9-1-1 call has to be transferred, it is to give the caller the best response.

Q: What do I do if I'm cut off after they answer?

A: Always try to call 9-1-1 back. Don't wait for 9-1-1 calltaker to try to contact you. They may not have received your cell phone number in the initial 9-1-1 call and may need additional information.

Q: Can I keep driving when I call 9-1-1 on a cellular phone?

A: It is usually best to pull over when calling 9-1-1, as there is less chance of the cell phone signal being dropped if in a stationary location. Additionally, any emergency instructions that need to be carried out can best be done while stopped. Finally, if help needs to reach you it is best to be in one place so help can get to you, instead of trying to meet them somewhere. If you cannot safely pull over to speak to 9-1-1 then stay calm, pay attention to the roadway with surrounding vehicles, and follow the 9-1-1 calltaker's instructions.

Q: Should I program 9-1-1 or turn on my auto 9-1-1 feature on my cellular phone?

A: **NO**, please don't program 9-1-1 or use the auto 9-1-1 feature. There are numerous accidental calls to 9-1-1 from cell phones that have this feature. The callers often don't realize that their phone has called 9-1-1. Help reduce accidental calls to 9-1-1 by only calling when you have a life-threatening emergency.

For more information, please visit:

Dispatch Monthly Magazine
www.911dispatch.com

Federal Communications Commission
<http://www.fcc.gov/pshs/services/>

National Emergency Number Association
www.nena.org

Santa Clara County Fire Department
www.sccfd.org