

# Follow these tips when dialing 911 for emergencies

Each time I sit down to write an article for Our Place, I attempt to address subjects that impact our daily lives here in The Villages. This time around, I think it's important to talk about a question that frequently comes my way – what is the correct way to contact help in an emergency?

The best answer is to dial 911. It's important to remember that mere seconds can seem like an eternity when an emergency situation is unfolding in front of you. And that same feeling can happen when you call 911 and are asked to answer several pertinent questions in the heat of the moment.

Let me assure you that as hard and as stressful as the situation might be, the answers you give to those important questions can help make sure you get the exact type of help you need in a very timely fashion. Seconds can mean life or death in some situations, so remaining calm and providing clear, concise information is paramount when using 911.

Now for a bit of history. In case you're aren't familiar with the origins of the 911 system, it came into use in the United States in 1967. It was designed to function as a universal emergency number. This number was chosen because it met the public requirements – brief, easily remembered and can be dialed quickly.

The first 911 call was placed in February 1968 in Haleyville, Alabama. From then on, the use of 911 not only has expanded into a nationwide system for requesting help, but it has evolved into a highly sophisticated system that has taken on



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different roles worldwide.

Not only does this system function with traditional landline phones, it's also able to provide enhanced services to cellular networks.

When you dial 911 on a landline phone, several steps occur. The call is routed to the closest public safety answering point. And before the call is answered, the dispatcher has the address and phone number you are calling from on the screen in front of them.

Next, the dispatcher will ask a series of questions. Is your emergency a medical, fire or law enforcement issue? When the nature is identified, your call will be transferred to the proper agency or agencies, if need be.

The second dispatcher will verify the location information and type of incident. This is done as quickly as possible after receiving the request for help. As with any type of incident, the dispatcher is processing the information without delay, so the proper assignment is being dispatched simultaneously while he or she is on the line with the caller.

If the event is for a medical emergency, both a paramedic unit from the fire department and an ambulance are being dispatched. Often, the dispatcher will remain on the line with the caller to provide pre-arrival instructions, such as how to control bleeding, perform CPR, etc. This support continues

until the arrival of the responding agency.

Law enforcement-related incidents require additional information from the caller regarding type of incident, description of suspects or vehicles, etc. The dispatcher will provide you with safety advice if the suspects are still in the area.

Keep in mind that these additional steps are not delaying response; they are occurring simultaneously with responding units. If the incident is fire-related, they will instruct you to leave the structure and find a safe location.

The use of cellphones has become a topic of discussion over the past few months. Yes, a person can dial 911 from his or her cellphone from any location and make contact with a 911 center. The missing item with cellphones is that the 911 center will not get an exact location, as there is no database like there is with landlines.

The location of a cellphone is based on tower locations and triangulation of the signal. With most phone carriers, this is a rough approximation within about 36 feet of your location.

Here are some helpful hints when calling 911:

- If you accidentally dial 911, wait for the operator to answer the phone. Do not hang up. Once the operator answers, you can explain it was a mistake.

- With cellphones, it takes at least three rings for someone to pick up, or about 15 seconds. In an emergency situation, that can seem like a very long time. It is imperative to stay on the line until an operator answers.

- When calling from a

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cellphone, know what county you are in, any surrounding landmarks and a possible cross street.

- Cellphones with phone numbers outside of Florida will go to the 911 answer point closest to you.

- If you are traveling abroad, check with your phone company about what number to dial in emergencies and confirm that your phone works outside of the United States.

- Remain calm. The operator will be asking you questions. Remember that the process is already in motion and the emergency responders have been activated.

- If you are using a voice-over-Internet landline phone service, please keep your address with your provider updated as you move. If you fail to do this, the original address of record will appear in the 911 dispatch database and the responders could be dispatched to your former address, which obviously will cause a delay in responding to

the emergency.

If you have any concerns or questions about your 911 information in the emergency database, please contact your local 911 coordinator for Sumter County (728-6909), Lake County (343-9458) or Marion County (671-8460).

That's all for this week. See you next time here at *Our Place*.

*Edmund Cain is The Villages Public Safety Department fire chief. He can be reached at [edmund.cain@districtgov.org](mailto:edmund.cain@districtgov.org).*