

9-1-1 Never Sleeps

Scenario - The setting is an emergency communications center where 9-1-1 operators are answering 9-1-1 phone calls and sending help to callers. It is 8:15 in the morning.

9-1-1 Operator: “9-1-1. What is the exact location of the emergency?”

Caller: “425 Pinewood Avenue in New Haven. Unit 27B.””

9-1-1 Operator: “What number are you calling from?”

Caller: “555-1212”

9-1-1 Operator: “Tell me exactly what happened.”

Caller: “My husband woke me up about 4 a.m. and said he was having trouble breathing. He didn’t want me to bother anyone because he thought it would get better but it’s much worse now.”

9-1-1 operators, also called dispatchers or telecommunicators, receive calls like this every day - calls from people who delay calling 9-1-1 because they “don’t want to bother anyone” or because they rely on family and friends to help in emergencies. 9-1-1 operators note that it is usually elderly callers who hesitate to call 9-1-1. Some believe that this is because many elderly persons were raised to be self-reliant, or learned to call family members when there was a need. ***In emergency situations, early intervention is critical.*** Minutes, even seconds, make a difference.

Calling 9-1-1 gets a person the help he or she needs in the shortest time possible. 9-1-1 operators advise the public to call 9-1-1 and wait for help to arrive. In medical emergencies, callers should wait for help rather than drive or be driven to a hospital or medical facility. Not using 9-1-1 emergency services could put them at greater risk. The 9-1-1 operator will give the caller instructions on what to do until help arrives.

9-1-1 operators, police, fire, and emergency medical staff are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, including holidays, to respond to 9-1-1 calls. 9-1-1 operators stress the importance of calling 9-1-1 ***first*** for emergencies. Calling family members first delays getting needed help. Family and friends can always be called later.

Here are some questions and answers to help you use 9-1-1 appropriately.

Question #1: When should I call 9-1-1?

Answer: Call 9-1-1 for emergencies! An emergency is when immediate police, fire or medical assistance is needed to protect life or property. Call 9-1-1

- To report a crime
- To report a fire
- If you are injured or suddenly become ill

- To report a missing person, particularly a child or elderly person who may be in danger.

Question #2: When shouldn't I call 9-1-1?

Answer: You shouldn't call 9-1-1 to ask for the phone number for town hall. You shouldn't call 9-1-1 to ask when the parade starts, or to complain about a neighbor's loud music. These are legitimate concerns, but are *not emergencies*. Phone numbers for town offices are listed in the blue pages of the phone book. Police departments have phone numbers for non-emergency situations. 9-1-1 operators recommend keeping phone numbers for routine police matters near the phone.

Question #3: What if I'm not sure if a situation is an emergency?

Answer: When in doubt, *always* call 9-1-1. As part of their education, 9-1-1 operators are trained to determine whether a situation is an emergency or not.

Question #4: Is there another number I can call for non-emergency information?

Answer: Connecticut residents can call 2-1-1 (Infoline) for many different types of help. Professional call specialists help callers with such complex issues as substance abuse, gambling, domestic violence programs, suicide prevention, financial problems, and much more. The most frequently requested services are: Financial Assistance, Food, Protective Services, Legal Assistance, Child Care, Utilities, Heat, Social Support, Housing, and Mental Health. Infoline's staff is available 24 hours a day.

For more information about 9-1-1, contact the Office of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications (OSET) at (860) 685-8080.

This article was written by the 9-1-1 Accessibility Workgroup with representatives from:

Avon Police Department
Brookfield Police Department
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
City of Hartford
Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired
Cromwell Police Department
Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
Department of Public Safety
Department of Social Services - Aging Services Division
Groton Emergency Communications Center
National Emergency Numbers Association - Connecticut Chapter
New Fairfield Emergency Communications Center
New Haven Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities
New Haven Emergency Response Center
Norwalk Police Department
Norwich Police Department
Trumbull Police Department
Westport Police Department.