

## What happens when I dial 911?

When you call 911, your call is answered by an emergency call-taker whose first responsibility is to find out if this is a true emergency: Is someone injured? Is there a crime in progress? Is there a fire? etc. If it is an emergency, the call-taker will handle your call. If the call-taker determines it is not an emergency, your call may be transferred to one of our non-emergency lines. You may experience a brief wait for one of the non-emergency call-takers to handle your call. You may also receive a recorded message. Do not hang up and call back or you will lose your position in the waiting order.

Your call is handled the same way if you dial any of the other lines that are connected to the 911 Center, such as the numbers listed under "non-emergency" in the phone book.

The major benefit in dialing 911 instead of a 7-digit number from any landline telephone (besides the ease and speed) is that information about where you are is immediately available to the call-taker. For 911 calls the phone company provides the following:

- the phone number
- the address where that phone is located\*
- who owns the phone
- which emergency responders serve that area

**\*IMPORTANT!** This information must always be verified! For example, you may have just moved, or you may be in a complex (such as an apartment complex), which lists only one main address. You may also be calling for a situation that is occurring elsewhere. The call-taker will ask for specific address information, including the nearest cross-street where the problem is taking place.

Wireless 911 Calls – When you place a wireless 911 call it is not the same as calling from a landline. While wireless technology is improving, **we probably won't get an exact location of the caller. Giving your location to the call-taker is vital.**

## Why do they ask me so many questions?

The call-taker will need to ask questions in order to give responders an accurate picture of your situation and decide how to approach the situation. **It is important to understand that in an emergency responders may already be on the way while you are talking to the call-taker;** we are updating the information as they respond to your call.

The call-taker needs to ask the four basic W's for every call: where, what, who, when and weapons (sometimes)...

**Where?** This includes more than just the address. An apartment number, floor, suite number, landmarks, or even the color of your house. Especially important is the nearest intersection, or cross-street, to the address. This makes it easier and quicker for responders to find you and helps rule out duplicate street names.

**What?** This is the basic "bottom-line" of the call-what is the exact problem? We don't require long descriptions of the events leading up to what is happening, just what the immediate problem is. Are you in physical danger? Is there intoxication or weapons involved? Is there a fire? Or do you just need information or a referral? Also, try to remain as calm as possible; it only makes the process longer if the call-taker is spending time trying to understand an excited or hysterical caller.

**Who?** This is to identify suspects in crimes, especially if they just left (so responding officers don't drive right past the bad guys!). This means clothing descriptions, names (if known) and last known location or direction of travel.

**When?** It makes a difference if the incident is occurring right now or happened an hour ago, so a time frame is important.

## What type of questions will they ask me?

Depending on what your call is about, the call-taker may need to ask for specific types of information, such as:

### POLICE CALLS

- Suspect and/or vehicle information. This information is relayed to responding officers so they may catch suspects while responding or just arriving.
- Information about weapons or intoxicated persons, for officer safety.
- Whether or not you wish to personally speak with the officers.

### FIRE CALLS

- Where the emergency is located.
- What exactly is burning, and whether or not flames are visible or just a smoke odor.
- If there are any injuries. NOTE: If you are reporting a fire, you will be told to leave the burning structure immediately. **DO NOT GO BACK INSIDE FOR ANY REASON!** Be prepared to tell firefighters where any hazards or trapped persons are.

### MEDICAL CALLS

- Age of the victim
- If the victim is conscious (awake) and their breathing status.
- The chief complaint (difficulty breathing, bleeding, chest pains, general illness, etc.)

The call-taker may ask you if you know how to do CPR. In some cases you may be given instructions on things you can do to help the victim until the responders arrive, including CPR.

## Do I have to give my name?

The call-taker is always required to ask the caller's name and phone number. This is in case we have to call you back, or the responders need to talk to someone who actually saw what happened. **YOU DO NOT HAVE TO GIVE YOUR NAME.** Your call will be handled the same regardless if you choose not to identify yourself.

## Now what happens?

Your call is sent to the dispatcher by our computer system. The call-taker may stay on the line to continue to update information for in-progress incidents or to give you instructions on what to do until help arrives.

## When will help arrive?

The time it takes for a responder to arrive after your call depends on several factors. All calls are given a priority that is based upon the incident type and whether or not the incident is still in progress. The priorities assigned to each incident type are predetermined by the responding agencies themselves, not 911. In this manner, a shooting or fight takes a higher priority than a loud party or parking complaint. Other factors are weather, how far the unit is from the incident, and how busy the agency is at that time. As a result, calls that are not a high priority may wait until a unit becomes available in that area.

## I want to know more!

If you would like more information about how 911 works, to arrange a tour, or if you are dissatisfied with our service or would like to commend one of our employees, call our administration office at 435-7911 during business hours or visit our web site @ [www.ongov.net/911](http://www.ongov.net/911)

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## Service Compliments or Complaints

The Onondaga County Department of Emergency Communications is committed to providing the highest level of customer service to the public. To that end, we encourage and welcome feedback on our performance to include compliments for our employees for a job well done or complaints regarding unsatisfactory service.

Compliments are shared with the employee and his/her supervisor. Exceptional performance is reviewed by our Personnel Action Committee and may result in a formal commendation or award.

All complaints will be formally documented and assigned to a supervisor for investigation and an appropriate disposition. Complainants will be notified as to our finding.

Compliments or complaints may be brought to the attention of any supervisor or to the attention of the Commissioner via email at [e9com1@ongov.net](mailto:e9com1@ongov.net), by calling (315) 435-7911 or by mail. Written compliments or complaints should be sent to:

Commissioner  
Onondaga County  
Department of Emergency Communications  
3911 Central Avenue  
Syracuse, NY 13215

Please include as much information about the incident as possible (e.g., date and time, nature of the incident, number you called from, employee's name).

# The Facts About 9-1-1

## What Everyone should Know About The Onondaga County 9-1-1 System

ONONDAGA COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF



EMERGENCY  
COMMUNICATIONS

[www.ongov.net/911](http://www.ongov.net/911)

J. Ryan McMahon II  
County Executive

Julie K. Corn  
Commissioner

**Onondaga  
County**  
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