



**9 1 1**™

**THE NUMBER TO KNOW**

**The Lake County  
Guide to Calling 9-1-1**

The purpose of this brochure was to create a comprehensive guide for Lake County residents to review prior to calling 9-1-1.

In most emergencies, “seconds matter” and “time is of the essence”. Educating the public prior to an emergency can lead to clear and concise communication between the caller and the dispatcher, which may be the difference between life and death.

Having prior knowledge of possible questions that a dispatcher may ask can assist with the apprehension of a suspect, the rescue of a person from a burning building or the saving of an individual’s life suffering from a medical emergency.

This guide may be extensive, but when it comes to saving a life, no shortcuts should be taken.

It is the mission of the LAKE COUNTY E-9-1-1 CENTER to provide the best quality, most cost effective public safety communications service available to the citizens and visitors of Lake County as well as all of the members of emergency response agencies who rely on us to quickly and courteously answer their calls for emergency service.

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# Guide to Calling 9-1-1

It is estimated that at least twice in your lifetime, you will have the need to call 9-1-1. In emergencies, clear and concise communication between the caller and the dispatcher may be the difference between life and death.

## How 9-1-1 Dispatch Works

When a call is made from a phone at a residence, business, or other landline, the phone number from which you are calling determines which 9-1-1 center receives the call for assistance. Cell phones transmit a signal to the nearest cellular tower. The signal is transmitted to the closest 9-1-1 center, as determined by the location of the cell tower that receives the incoming call. Sometimes cell phones calls are not routed to the correct 9-1-1 call center. However, 9-1-1 staff are trained to transfer a call to the correct center to get the needed help. Although a call using a cellular phone will give the dispatcher a general location, additional information may be needed to determine your exact location.

## When Should I Call 9-1-1?

A good rule of thumb is when someone's life, safety, health or property is in immediate danger, a call to 9-1-1 should be made. **9-1-1 SHOULD BE USED IN ANY SITUATION THAT REQUIRES ASSISTANCE FROM POLICE, FIRE OR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS).** In most emergencies, **"time is of the essence"** and **"seconds matter."** A delay in calling 9-1-1 may be the difference between life and death. If you are in doubt as to whether a situation is an emergency, call 9-1-1. It is better to be safe and let the dispatcher determine if emergency response is needed.

Some cities and towns have civilian employees who take reports of certain minor crimes over the phone. This is done to keep as many Police Officers "in the streets" as possible. You should typically not call to inquire when officers will arrive, unless the situation escalates. The Police always respond to emergency calls first.

## Prepare Yourself to call 9-1-1

First and foremost, ensure that the scene is safe. Once you recognize that you are in the midst of an emergency, take a step back and look at the "big

picture”. Then, proceed with caution. If you are in a dangerous environment, exit the situation and call from a safe location.

During emergencies, your adrenaline is pumping, which has both its advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is that many people experience a surge in strength. However, a major disadvantage is would-be rescuers jump into an emergency or situation with reckless abandon. **STAY CALM!** You cannot assist a person in need if you are incapacitated or injured. **DON'T PANIC!** In most emergencies “**time is of the essence,**” quickly take a couple deep breaths in order to maintain your composure.

At times, callers are screaming or crying uncontrollably, which can make it impossible for the dispatcher to understand how best to analyze the situation in order to provide the necessary support. Valuable time is being wasted. It is imperative that a caller articulate the needs of the situation during a **9-1-1** call.

Do not hang up if you are not connected immediately. During major emergencies, dispatch centers are typically swamped with calls. Most importantly, **DO NOT HANG UP UNTIL INSTRUCTED TO DO SO.**

If you should inadvertently call **9-1-1**, **DO NOT HANG UP.** Stay on the line to advise the dispatcher that no emergency exists. If a caller to **9-1-1** disconnects without the problem being stated, the caller must in turn be contacted in order to ensure that no actual emergency exists. This may involve the dispatching of an officer to your location. One common misconception that residents have about dialing **9-1-1** by mistake is that they will get in trouble. This is not true!

### **Why Do Dispatchers Ask So Many Questions?**

Dispatchers ask pertinent information first. This information will include address, type of call, name and number of caller and those involved. Once the initial information is obtained, additional information may be asked depending on the nature of the call. The questions will not slow down the dispatching of the emergency units. In emergencies, this information is relayed immediately to field units so they may begin responding to the incident, while the dispatcher remains on the phone to obtain further details that are also relayed to the responding units as it is gathered. To ensure all emergency resources needed are sent, a dispatcher may ask questions that may seem unnecessary. All

questions are pertinent and help to determine the level of support that is needed at the scene.

In emergencies, stress and tension levels are elevated. It is important to not express frustration at the dispatcher. This professional is there to assist with the emergency as quickly and efficiently as possible.

### **When reporting an emergency:**

- **Remain calm**
- **Speak clearly**
- **Listen for instructions**
- **Answer all questions**

### **Possible Questions That a Dispatcher May Ask**

The information provided to a dispatcher is relayed to responding officers, firefighters and paramedics while in-route to the call. This allows them to make critical and educated decisions about the appropriate response to the call and the equipment necessary to meet the needs of the situation.

### **The 6 W's - Where, What, When, Who, Weapons and Welfare**

**WHERE:** A dispatcher will always ask the location of the emergency. If the emergency is in a home or business, be prepared to give the exact address. If you are calling from a landline, the exact address will typically show up on the dispatcher's monitor. The dispatcher will typically ask you to repeat the address to ensure accuracy.

Providing an address for an apartment complex may be difficult at times. Be prepared to give the complete address including apartment letter or number. Many apartment buildings have secured entrances that require emergency responders to be buzzed into the building or have a keypad with an entry code. Be prepared to give the dispatcher any additional information needed to make entry. If the location is difficult to locate, if possible, send a person to escort the emergency responders to the scene of the situation. Also, be prepared to give additional information such as the name of the business, the color of the house, description of the vehicle, landmarks, etc. Be as specific as possible if the address is unknown. If you are at the residence of an unknown address, the dispatcher may ask you to pick up a piece of mail with the address on it.

In extreme situations, you may simply dial **9-1-1** and set the phone down if you are calling from a landline. It may not be safe for you to remain on the phone in certain situations. The dispatcher will send the Police. Do not assume that the dispatcher knows your location if you call from a cell phone. **IT IS ALWAYS BETTER TO CALL ON A LANDLINE WHEN POSSIBLE, IF ONE IS AVAILABLE.**

**WHAT:** State the nature of the emergency. Initially, a brief description is typically all that is necessary. Depending on the incident, the dispatcher is trained to ask specific questions to ensure proper resources are dispatched.

**WHEN:** Inform the dispatcher when the incident occurred, or if it is still in progress.

**WHO:** If a suspect is involved, a dispatcher will typically ask you to describe the suspect by providing the following information:

- Name - Include proper name, nicknames or alias
- Age - Approximate
- Sex - Male, female, transgender
- Race - White, Black, Hispanic, Asian
- Height - Short, average, tall
- Hairstyle & Color - Long blonde ponytail, bald
- Clothing - Include color: red jacket, blue jeans
- Other - Scars, Tattoos, walks with a limp
- Direction of travel - E, S, N, W, towards Walgreens

If a vehicle is involved possible questions a dispatcher may ask are:

- Color - Specific color, light, dark
- Year - Newer, older
- Make/Model - Chevy Silverado truck
- License - Plate number and State issued. Even partial plate number/letters help
- Other - Damage, toolbox, bumper stickers
- Direction of travel - N, S, E, W, towards Walgreens

**WEAPONS:** Advise the dispatcher immediately if weapons are involved. Ensure that you are in a safe environment. Be as specific as possible when describing the weapon (e.g., silver 44 caliber handgun, long black knife with a handle). Failure to advise dispatch immediately of a weapon could result in the injury or death of a Police Officer or innocent citizen. If possible and safe, secure the weapon as quickly as possible. If the situation is stable and a weapon is present, do not touch the weapon. This may be a possible active crime scene.

**WELFARE:** The dispatcher will ask if medical attention is needed. If medical attention is needed, a dispatcher may ask the following:

- Name - If known
- Age - Approximate
- Sex - male, female, transgender
- Location of patient
- Signs, symptoms - Unconscious, trouble breathing, bleeding
- Cause of incident - Fall, stabbed
- Medical History/Medication - If aware, advise dispatch

Questions a dispatcher may ask if a fire is involved may include:

- What is the address/location?
- What is on fire (e.g.: house, car, grass)?
- Is anyone inside the building?
- Is anyone injured?
- How large is the fire- estimate?
- Any structures threatened?
- Is the fire spreading?
- What color are the flames or smoke- Possible Hazardous-Material incident?

### **Domestic Violence and the 9-1-1 Dispatcher**

Domestic violence is a very serious problem. In some cases, battering escalates to homicide and suicide.

The FBI reports that a woman is battered every 15 seconds in the United States. Domestic violence also creates a significant threat to children in the home. Violence in the home has a ripple effect. It creates a volatile atmosphere at home which in turn, destroys lives and families.

The **9-1-1** dispatcher has an important role in a domestic violence call. Oftentimes, the dispatcher is the first person the victim of domestic violence calls for assistance. How a dispatcher responds may affect the safety of the victim and children, if any are present. The **9-1-1** taped conversation between the caller and the dispatcher may be vital evidence needed, should prosecution be necessary.

The **9-1-1** dispatcher is also a vital link between the victim and the responding Police Officers. The officers on the scene must be able to rely on the information provided by the dispatcher. At times, the safety of both the victim and the responding officers will depend on the actions of the dispatcher. During domestic disputes, dispatchers are trained to listen for background noises such as screams, shouts, threats and breaking glass during the **9-1-1** call.

On occasion, the dispatcher may ask indirect questions in order to determine if the assailant is present. Indirect questioning may permit the victim to obtain the needed police assistance. One technique used to confirm if a caller is in an emergency situation is asking the caller to select a number between one and five if assistance is needed.

If you are a victim of domestic violence, **GET HELP IMMEDIATELY!**

### **Can I Remain Anonymous?**

When you speak to the dispatcher, make it known that you wish to remain anonymous. That information will be provided to the responding agencies, who will do all that they can to ensure that the identity of the caller is protected.

### **Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TTY/TDD)**

If you are hearing or speech impaired, **LAKE COUNTY E-9-1-1 CENTER** is equipped with a text telephone (TTY/TDD), also known as a telecommunications device for the deaf. If a deaf or hearing/speech impaired caller has a landline but does not have a



TTY/TDD, the caller should call **9-1-1** and should NOT HANG UP. The address will be displayed and help will be sent.

## **Texting Service**

Texting is an option to assist the hearing and speech impaired. In the event of a home invasion, abduction or medical condition where the caller cannot speak texting may be the best option to communicate with a **9-1-1** dispatcher. A text should include the nature of the emergency and your location. If able, it is preferred that you call **9-1-1**. **SEND YOUR TEXT TO 911.**

## **Internet/Digital Phone**

Voice-Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) also called internet, digital, broadband or cable phone service, is a rapidly growing alternative to traditional phone service. Low prices, more features and the ability to choose a phone number from nearly anywhere in the country are attractive features for the consumer.

VOIP may look and appear like a traditional phone, but it connects to the internet, not a telephone line. There are several critical factors to consider regarding the impact of this service and your ability to call **9-1-1** in an emergency. It is important for the consumer to understand the potential limitations this technology has with regard to accessing **9-1-1**.

- Check with your service provider for emergency calling features
- If your power is out, your VOIP service may not work. Consider buying a back-up power supply
- Be sure to keep your registered location current with your VOIP provider
- Inform children, babysitters and visitors about your VOIP service
- Consider keeping a landline phone for contacting **9-1-1**
- Burglar alarms, fax machines, satellite TV and DVRs often rely on analog modems. Check with your provider to determine if their service supports analog modems

## Foreign Language

When necessary, the dispatcher can add an interpreter from an outside agency to assist. **THE LAKE COUNTY E-9-1-1 CENTER** contracts a service that provides interpretation of over 200 languages, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. It is helpful if the caller can articulate the name of his/her language in English.

## Disconnecting Traditional Phone Service

Many people are making the decision to disconnect their home phone and rely on their cellular phone for service. If you decide to use only a cell phone, keep these important tips in mind:

- A landline telephone gives dispatchers an exact location
- Cell phones with location technology only provide an approximate location
- If you have an outdated phone, the dispatcher may not receive your location information
- Most TRAC phones do not provide GPS coordinates
- Choose your phone wisely, Your life may depend on it

## TIPS

- It is highly recommended that you take a certified CPR/AED course. Even when EMS professionals are readily available, prompt, properly administered CPR may be the difference between life and death
- Utilize the dispatcher as a resource during CPR. Set your phone on speaker phone so the dispatcher may walk you through CPR instructions.
- Educate your children on the proper use of **9-1-1**. Explain the difference between emergency and non-emergency situations to your children
- If you are calling from a school, large business or other place that has a phone system, you may need to dial **9-9-1-1** or another number. Look for an instruction card on the phone

- For the elderly and individuals with special needs, write their name, age, address, phone, nearest intersection and any other information that you feel may be pertinent on a card readily accessible. If medication is included, update the card with every change in medication
- Ensure that your address is prominently displayed. At night it may be difficult for the emergency responders to locate your home
- If you witness an event that requires an immediate response, call 9-1-1. Do not assume that the emergency has been reported
- If you call 9-1-1 from a cell phone that is not “initialized” (meaning you do not have a contract for service with a wireless service provider), and your emergency call gets disconnected, you must call the dispatcher back because the dispatcher does not have your telephone number and cannot contact you
- It is also important that you share this information with your family and friends. A good teaching exercise would be to create different Police, Fire or medical emergency scenarios with your family that require calling 9-1-1 and providing pertinent information to the dispatcher.

This Guide can be found on the Lake County website at :

<http://cms.lakecountyin.org/opencms/opencms/permalink/df9be338-adfb-11e5-a5ef-2d53826b70d3.pdf>



**THE NUMBER TO KNOW**

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