

# WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU CALL 911

## **What is 911?**

911 is an emergency response service provided by St. Lucie County to assist the citizens of our county with receiving law enforcement, fire and medical assistance during crisis times. St. Lucie County Public Safety E911 staffs special emergency phone lines twenty-four (24) hours a day so that the citizens of St. Lucie County may receive help as expeditiously as possible. St. Lucie County Public Safety E911 answers the initial emergency phone lines for the Fort Pierce Police Department, Port St. Lucie Police Department, St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office, as well as St. Lucie County Fire District.

While answering 911 calls, St. Lucie County Public Safety E911 also answer non-emergency calls on regular administrative phone-lines. Obviously, someone in a crisis situation will get assistance prior to someone calling with a non-emergency situation.

## **When should you call 911?**

911 Emergency calls should be made only in cases such as a crime in progress, a fire, medical emergency, or a similar immediately threatening incident. A possible 911 situation can involve something you see- a burglar breaking into a neighbor's house, a fire, and an automobile accident. It can also involve what you hear – a person screaming or yelling, "Don't hit me again," gunfire, an explosion or glass breaking. Also, a suspected drunk driver - is always a 911 call. They are not only a danger to themselves, but innocent bystanders as well.

Before you call, gather as many facts as you can under the circumstances and write them down so you won't forget them. Take a second look – a few seconds or more, gathering complete information may be worth the delay. If you are describing a person, important points include the race of the person, whether it is a male or a female, what the individual is wearing, the color of his or her hair and any other outstanding characteristics. With a car description, a tag number is a great if you can get it, and a report that the vehicle has a ladder on top or a dented left front fender is more useful than simply describing the vehicle as a "white van."

It is the responsibility of the Communications Officer known as a Telecommunicator to gather as much pertinent information relative to the situation as possible, and to keep you on the phone if at all possible. This action better prepares emergency responders coming to your aid.

## **What to expect when you call 911?**

When you call 911 emergency lines, the phone will be answered "911, Do you need Police, Fire or Ambulance?" One of the first things we want to find out if this is an emergency situation. This question is a necessary one because unfortunately, some people do call 911 for non-emergencies. Telecommunicators often deal with 911 calls for directions, weather conditions, or traffic information. This misuse of 911 is unacceptable, and has the potential of delaying true emergency calls.

Once it is established that you do have an emergency situation, the Telecommunicator will ask you a series of questions in an effort to get and enough information so he/she can send the proper assistance to you as soon as possible. Try to answer the questions as calmly and clearly as possible. Help will be sent to you right away, and the more cooperative you are over the phone, the faster that help will arrive. When you call 911, a computerized system will automatically tell the Telecommunicator your address and phone number; however, they must confirm this information with you, especially if you are from a cell phone. The Telecommunicator will continue to talk as long

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as is pertinent, but help has been dispatched to you. The longer he/she can keep you on the phone and the more information that can be relayed to the responding law enforcement officers, paramedics, or firefighters, the better and safer the situation is.

If you have a medical or fire emergency you will be transferred in-house to a St. Lucie County Fire District Telecommunicator. During this transfer, you may hear a click but **DO NOT HANG UP**. You will be asked to re-verify your information.

The Telecommunicators for St. Lucie County Fire District are trained in Emergency Medical Dispatching. This means if you have a medical emergency, the Telecommunicator will be able to assist with pre-arrival First Aid instructions, such as performing CPR, the Heimlich maneuver for choking victims, or other common medical emergencies.

## **Misuse of the 911 Emergency System.**

Unfortunately, a substantial number of 911 calls received in St. Lucie County are not of an emergency nature. If you need directions, the time of day, or parade route information, 911 is not the proper number to call. The St. Lucie County Public Safety E911 offers a non-emergency phone number for the reporting of miscellaneous non-emergency information or questions. However, 911 emergency calls must come first. Your call will still be handled appropriately, but this will allow true emergencies to be handled first.

911 is for emergency calls only, and is not equipped to answer questions such as giving directions, weather forecasts, or road conditions. To report a non-emergency call, the following phone number may be called twenty-four (24) hours a day: 772-465-5770.

## **What if I call 911 by mistake?**

If you or anyone in your household including children call 911 by mistake, do not hang up, stay on the line. St. Lucie County is an Enhanced 911 Center, and we can obtain the location where 911 was called from. If you dial 911 by mistake and hang up, our policy is to try to call the number back and reach an adult who can tell us if there is any problem. If we are unable to make contact, **law enforcement will be dispatched** to verify there is not a problem. This takes law enforcement away from being able to handle a real emergency. If you stay on the line and speak to the Telecommunicator, we will ask you to verify that you do not have an emergency along with verification of your address. Remember that old deactivated cellular phones can still call 911 as long as the battery is charged. Do not allow your children to play with home phone or cellular phones. Children make the majority of 911 hang-ups we receive but we still have to treat them as an emergency.

## **Can you find me if I call 911 from my cellular phone?**

If your cellular phone is equipped with GPS, we should be able to pinpoint your approximate location. When you dial 911 from your cellular phone, your call will be routed to the nearest cellular phone tower belonging to your cellular phone provider. So while you may be in St. Lucie County using your cellular phone, you may actually hit a tower in another county. Therefore, your call will be answered by that county's 911 Center. Just explain your emergency is in St. Lucie County, and they should be able to transfer you back to St. Lucie County. You will be asked to verify your location and your

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cellular phone number. If you have an older cellular phone that does not have GPS, you will need to stay on the line, give the Telecommunicator your location or describe it the best you can.

Please keep in mind cellular phones are not always very clear. Be patient if you are asked to repeat information.

## **Help Responders Find You Faster:**

Ensure that your house and/or mailbox are marked and numerically correct. Reflective numbers work best for nighttime. If it is dark outside, turn some outside lights on to aide responders in finding your home. If you can hear the siren, and are able to reach the light switch, start turning it on and off so that it flickers and draws the responder's attention.

If you have a long driveway or your house is not easily seen from the road, try to have someone at the end of the driveway safely by the road to flag down responders. Consider placing driveway markers at the end of your driveway to help responders.

Put all pets safely away. Responders will refrain from exiting their vehicle or entering a residence if there is a dog barking or growling at them.

## **Things To Remember:**

You do not have to give your name to report a crime, but it does help law enforcement to know in case further information that only you can provide.

It is a crime to falsely report a crime, so make sure you are giving factual information when reporting a crime or emergency. Not doing so may delay a response to an actual emergency causing injury or death to another person.

Have a fire escape plan for your home and make sure everyone is familiar with it. Establish a designated safe place for family members to meet outside of your home. Practice often with younger children until everyone knows what to do.

Check your smoke detectors frequently to ensure they are working, and replace batteries regularly. Early detection is the best way to get everyone out safe.

Learn CPR or take First Aid Classes.

If you come across someone who has been injured, do not move him/her but try to cover him/her with a blanket, jacket or something that will keep them warm. Even in warm weather, shock can set in.

**DO NOT PANIC! Remain Calm.**

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