

9-1-1 Information Everyone Needs to Know

Know WHAT 9-1-1 is

9-1-1 is the phone number people can call from any phone anywhere in the United States when they need help or see someone who needs help right away.

Know WHEN to call 9-1-1

9-1-1 is for emergencies only. Callers should only dial 9-1-1 if someone is very ill, seriously hurt or in danger, or if they are in immediate need of police, fire, or medical assistance. If callers aren't sure if their situation is an emergency, they should err on the side of safety and call 9-1-1 and let the dispatcher who answers the call make the decision whether to send help or not.

Know WHEN NOT to call 9-1-1

Callers shouldn't call 9-1-1 just because they need help finding an address or there is a raccoon in their garage. While those situations may count as emergencies for a caller, they aren't emergencies for public safety. Inappropriate use of the 9-1-1 system wastes resources and ties up the lines at the 9-1-1 center, and nobody wants delayed service. Not to mention that, in Ohio, harassing or making prank calls to 9-1-1 is a crime.

Know the capabilities of the device you are using

9-1-1 can be contacted from pretty much every device that can make phone calls (traditional landline, cell, VoIP), but the callback and location information that accompanies your call to the 9-1-1 center can vary drastically amongst technologies and between geographic regions. 9-1-1 and telecommunications professionals are hard at work to make sure 9-1-1 works the same on all devices in the future, but until then it is your job to be knowledgeable about benefits and limitations associated with various technologies. Contact one's service provider(s) for more information.

Know what happens when you call 9-1-1

After callers dial, the person who picks up on the other end will be someone who works at a 9-1-1 center and whose job it is to help them. Dispatchers may ask callers to do things to help or ask them questions. It is important that callers follow dispatchers' directions as best they can. Dispatchers will send someone to wherever callers are and stay on the phone with them until everyone is safe.

Know where you are

This is probably the most important information callers can provide as a 9-1-1 caller, so they should try to be aware of their surroundings. Callers should make a real effort to be as detailed as possible; if they are outside and don't know the street address, they should take a look around and try to find landmarks or cross streets. If callers are inside a large building or one with multiple levels, they can help emergency services by letting them know which floor they are on, which apartment number they are in, which door to enter, etc.

Stay calm

When callers are on the phone with 9-1-1, they are the dispatcher's eyes and ears. Even though callers may want to, they need to try not to panic. If callers are crying or yelling, it can be difficult for the 9-1-1 operator to understand them. Callers need to pull themselves together, stay strong, and answer all of the 9-1-1 operator's questions they can get the right services to the proper location.

Never hang up

You may have called 9-1-1 by accident, or your situation may have resolved itself, but it is important to let the 9-1-1 operator know this. If you end the call abruptly, the folks at the 9-1-1 center are going to assume that something has gone very wrong and will either call you back or send help anyway. This will take away from the 9-1-1 center's ability to take calls and dispatch services to on-going emergencies, so make sure the 9-1-1 call taker tells you it is ok to disconnect before you hang up. And keep in mind that the call taker can dispatch responders to your location without disconnecting from the call, so, until you are instructed to do otherwise, make sure to hold the line so that you can provide any necessary information updates.

Post your address clearly and prominently in multiple Locations

Having your address easily visible at the end of your driveway AND on your home itself will ensure that first responders aren't left wondering if they are at the right location. Make sure that you use numbering and lettering that can be seen during the day or night, and are visible no matter which direction you are coming from.

If you live in the county make sure your green address sign is displayed properly at the end of your driveway and visible from either direction.

Report missing street signs in your neighborhood immediately

Making sure that your neighborhood has all the proper signage not only helps friends and family find your home, but it can be crucial during an emergency situation and time is of the essence.

Don't let kids play with old cell phones

Many people don't know this, but the law mandates that even old, deactivated cell phones with no associated service plan must still be able to call 9-1-1. An old cell phone may seem to be the perfect free toy, but giving your seemingly useless device to a youngster may lead to problems. So, if you want to turn that old phone you have laying around into a plaything, be sure to remove the battery before turning it over to your inquisitive youngster. Better yet, consider donating any unwanted retired wireless devices to a charitable program that can safely recycle them. You can drop old cell phones off at the Sheriff's Office, 113 N. Market St in Van Wert, to be donated to a charitable organization.

Teach kids what 9-1-1 is

Let them know that 9-1-1 is the number to call when they need help or they see someone who needs help right away.

It is important that children learn that there are specific times when calling 9-1-1 is the right thing to do. Let them know that they should only call when someone or something is hurt or in danger or if they need a police officer, a firefighter, or a doctor. Teach them how to use your cell phone, land line or other device to call 9-1-1

Practice makes perfect

Help your kids memorize information that will be useful to 9-1-1 call takers, such as their name, their parents' names, their address, and their phone number. The more comfortable they are, the more quickly they can provide vital information to the 9-1-1 call taker who can then dispatch the appropriate responders to the location.

Engage in ongoing, age appropriate training

Once is never enough, as they say, and your job isn't done after your kids understand the basics. As the years pass, technology will change and so will a child's capacity to provide crucial details to the 9-1-1 dispatcher. It is up to parents to make sure that children are knowledgeable about the features and capabilities of the 9-1-1 system and that they are ready to provide the most detailed information and they know how to use telecommunication devices, such as different brands of smartphones, etc.

The groups listed below can provide you with more information on 9-1-1 and public safety issues:

The National Emergency Number Association (NENA) / www.nena.org.

The Wireless Foundation / www.wirelessfoundation.org.

The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International /

www.apcointl.org

9-1-1 Coordinator Kim Brandt Office (phone 419.238.3866 or on Facebook Van Wert County 9-1-1 Operations).