

Guidelines for Calling 911

Calling the police, fire, or rescue squad can be a daunting experience. After all, what constitutes an emergency? When should you call 911 versus the police non-emergency number 301-279-8000? While each situation is different and must be evaluated by the person making the call, there are some general guidelines. Remember, when in doubt call the police. They can assist in determining if a situation warrants a police response.

REMEMBER – IT IS IMPORTANT TO CALL! The number of calls for service is one of the metrics the MCPD uses when allocating patrol officer resources to neighborhoods, so if in doubt, call!

When to Call 911 – Emergencies

- Life threatening situations (fights, weapons, personal injury auto collision, etc)
- Sexual assault in progress or that has just occurred
- Immediate fear for your personal safety or safety of others
- Serious crime in progress (ex. robbery, burglary, assault)
- Any type of fire

When to Call the Police Non-Emergency Number (301-279-8000)

- Discovery of a crime against property after the fact
- Suspicious situations (ex. Kids in the tot-lot after dark, possible drug activity or vandalism, unknown occupied vehicle in a cul-de-sac, etc)
- Noise Complaints
- Parking Violations
- Keys locked in vehicles (unless someone is inside and in danger)
- Property damage auto collision
- Loose or barking dogs

What to Expect when you Call 911

Remember to remain calm and let the call taker ask questions. The call taker will need the following information:

- **Location** – the exact address, intersection, place name (ex. Shopping center, park), etc. If calling from a land-line, your location is automatically determined by the system.
- **Nature of the event** – what happened and when, what is going on now, description of vehicles and people involved.
- **Your name and telephone number**
- **Do you want to have officers see you** There are 3 ways to participate in the reporting of an even. If you *participate fully*, that means you are willing to follow up with officers, and your information goes out over the radio. If you are a *reluctant* participant, officers contact you only if necessary, and your information does not go over the radio. If you are *anonymous*, no information is saved about you, but there is no requirement for the police to respond by a certain time, since there is no one to follow up with.

When Calling Remember to:

- Remain calm and speak clearly
- Let the call taker ask the questions
- Stay on the phone if it is safe to do so, or until the call taker advises you to hang up

- If during your call you get transferred, you will hear a series of clicks – don't hang up
- If the 911 center is extremely busy and your call is not answered within approximately 15 seconds, you will hear a recording indicating our operators are busy and to not hang up. The tones that follow the recording support devices for the hearing impaired. Stay on the line – do not hang up and call back.

Other Notes about 911

If you accidentally call 911, don't hang up! ***The MCPD must respond to any calls where the caller hung up because they don't know if it is because someone is in danger.*** Stay on the phone and advise the call taker that you accidentally called and that you do not have an emergency. Over 90% of accidental calls are from unlocked cell phones.

The call center handles over 1 million emergency and non-emergency calls every year, or an average of a call every 30 seconds. There are 14-18 call-takers on duty, and they handle both 911 and non-emergency calls. The goal is to answer all 911 calls within 12 seconds. With that kind of volume, the call takers try to take care of your call as quickly as possible so that they can be available to take the next call. They may seem brusque or rude, but in most cases they are trying to get the facts, handle to call appropriately, and move to the next call.

If you are unsatisfied with how your call is handled, you can ask for a supervisor, and you can also report your experience to the Community Safety Committee Chair, who will forward your complaint to our MCDP 1st District Community Outreach Officers.