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FIRE DEPARTMENT

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911 COMMUNICATIONS: KNOW WHEN TO MAKE THE CALL

System provides opportunity to help save lives but can be abused or overloaded

The following is one of a series of articles on Community Risk Reduction presented by the Muscatine Fire Department.

MUSCATINE, Iowa – The Muscatine Fire Department urges the residents of Muscatine to examine when calling 9-1-1 is appropriate and when calling the non-emergency number would be best. Everyone wants emergency calls to go through quickly as it could be a matter of life or death.



Calling 9-1-1 can save your life or the life of a loved one. Fire, law enforcement, and ambulance logs are filled with incidents where people have helped save lives and property by dialing 9-1-1.

An emergency is any situation that requires immediate assistance from law enforcement, fire personnel, or ambulance services. But what if you are not sure if the situation qualifies for calling 9-1-1 or not?



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"If you believe that it is an actual emergency or if you are unsure as to the extent of the emergency, call 9-1-1 and let the dispatcher assess the situation and make the final determination," Jerry Ewers, Muscatine Fire Chief, said. "Do not hang up but do answer all the questions from the dispatcher."

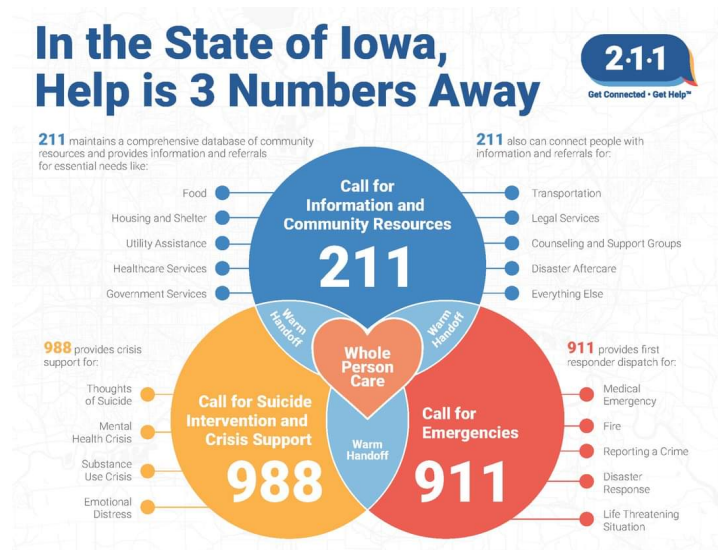
The 9-1-1 system is simplifying our lives, protecting us in emergencies, and providing opportunities to help others in need. This tool is available through most of the United States as a means to easily report any emergency without looking up other telephone numbers.

Unfortunately, 9-1-1 systems can, at times, be abused and overloaded. There are many instances where 9-1-1 was dialed as a joke, to just ask for information, or to report a nuisance. In some areas of the country, these examples account for the majority of 9-1-1 calls.

"Please remember, dialing 9-1-1 is for an emergency and is serious," Ted Hillard, Blue Shift Battalion Chief and Public Education Chief, said. "Calling unnecessarily can endanger someone else's life or property when they really do need help."

Old phones laying around the house may also result in unintentional calls to 9-1-1 if a child is using the device as a "play" phone. As long as the phone is charged and turned on, a call can be placed to 911 although an inactive phone will not provide a location or a call back number.

The Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management also urges parents and caregivers to teach children about 911. It is important so that children learn that there are specific times





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when calling 911 is the right thing to do.

According to the Iowa DHS, we need to "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."

If children use a real phone as a play phone, the Iowa DHS asks that you make sure that the children know not to dial 911 as a joke or during playtime.

If you become aware that an accidental call has been made, stay on the line and let the dispatcher know what has happened.

When should you call 911?

- You witness or are the victim of a serious crime.
- You smell smoke or see uncontrolled fire.
- You witness or are involved in a serious accident.
- There is an emergency illness, injury or suspected poisoning.
- When a child / senior citizen / handicapped person is lost, confused, frightened, or needs special assistance.

OR

- There is any situation that is potentially dangerous and you are not sure who to call.

What should I do if there's a fire in my home?

- Do not use your home telephone to call.
- Stay low and get out of your house immediately.
- Call from your neighbor's house or from a pay phone.
- Remember, you can call 911 from a pay phone and the call is free.

When calling 911, remember to give the following information:



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- Your address.
- The phone number you are calling from.
- Your name.
- What your problem or situation is.
- **Be calm.** Speak clearly and remain on the line to answer all the dispatcher's questions as best you can.
- Did you know that you can text 911 in an emergency? It's always preferred that you call 911, but if you are in a situation where you can't call or talk, then text to 911 for help.

Don't call 911 to:

- Ask for a phone number you can't find in the book
- Inquire if a particular business or park is open
- Ask the cost of overnight fees at area campgrounds
- Complain about a barking dog
- Request a copy of an accident report
- To ask for directions

Call 911 by accident?

- Don't hang up.
- Answer the call or text back (if you did hang up)
- Explain what happened
- Don't beat yourself up (accidents do happen)

Ask yourself before you call

- If this were YOU, would you call 911?
- Is this a LIFE-THREATENING emergency?
- Can this be taken care of by a clinic or a nurse in the morning?

When you call

- This dispatcher will ask your location and nature of your emergency.



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- You will need to answer the questions.
- Emergency crews will be sent according to the level assigned.

After you call

- Never hang up until the dispatcher instructs you to.
- Be prepared to provide the same information or updated information to the emergency crew that responds.
- Be prepared to show emergency crews where the person is located.

Action steps you can take

How to identify a medical emergency

- Loss of consciousness
- Loss of limb
- Gasping for air or not breathing
- Experiencing an allergic reaction
- Having chest pain
- Having uncontrollable bleeding
- Having stroke like symptoms
- Any other symptoms that require immediate medical attention

When to call the non-emergency number

- Report a stolen car or bike
- Report a hazard not impacting the public
- A crime no longer in progress
- Minor injuries like a cut finger
- Graffiti
- Animals in trees
- Panhandling



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Numbers To Know

Iowa Child Abuse Hotline https://hhs.iowa.gov/programs/CPS	1-800-362-2178
Iowa Crisis Service & Support https://yourlifeiowa.org/	1-855-581-8111 Text: 1-855-895-8398
Suicide and Crisis Lifeline	988
Muscatine Code Enforcement	1-563-262-4141
Muscatine Utilities	1-563-263-2631
Iowa State Patrol Non-Emergency Phone Number	1-800-525-5555
Muscatine Fire & EMS Non-Emergency Phone Number	1-563-263-9233
Muscatine Police Non-Emergency Phone Number	1-563-263-9922
Muscatine Humane Society	1-563-263-7558
Iowa Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Road Reports – Iowa DOT	1-800-288-1047 511 from any mobile device

[A Guide to 911](#)