

Calling 9-1-1 from a Cell Phone

When calling 9-1-1 from a cell phone, your location may not automatically display to the 9-1-1 center as it does when calling from most homes or businesses.

Be Prepared to tell the 9-1-1 Calltaker...

- The location of the emergency - (Address, street intersection, landmarks, city, county, mile marker, etc.)
- What the emergency is and what type of assistance is needed
- Your cell phone number

Remember...

- Stay calm and speak clearly!
- Do not hang up until the 9-1-1 calltaker has obtained all of the information that is needed.
- Since you are calling from a cell phone, your call may be disconnected if the signal is lost. Be sure to call back if you are cut off.
- When calling 9-1-1 on a cellular phone, be sure to stop if you are in a moving vehicle. It is difficult to obtain all of the information needed if you are getting further from the emergency.
- Your call may need to be transferred to another agency.

Frequently Asked Questions

9-1-1 calls from a cell phone

Q: Can I call 9-1-1 on my cell phone and is there a cost involved?

A: Yes, you can call 9-1-1 on your cell phone. However, be prepared to give the 9-1-1 calltaker information about your location, because it is not like calling 9-1-1 on your home phone. It is free to call 9-1-1 on your cell phone.

Q: Does the 9-1-1 calltaker know my location?

A: Assume the 9-1-1 calltaker does **not** know your location. Even if your cell phone is able to provide location information, the chances are you will need to provide the 9-1-1 calltaker with additional location information. Remember, the approximate location the 9-1-1 center receives could be as large as 3 football fields or more. Be prepared to give specific directions to your location.

Q: What if I don't know where I'm at when I call 9-1-1?

A: Look for landmarks, large buildings, street signs or paperwork nearby that may contain address information. Think back to the main street or highway you were near when your emergency occurred. If others are around, ask them where you are. *Do not depend on your cell phone to tell 9-1-1 where you are!*

Q: Does the 9-1-1 calltaker know my phone number when I call 9-1-1 on a cell phone?

A: Maybe or maybe not, depending upon your cell phone provider. The safest way to approach the problem is to assume that the 9-1-1 calltaker will **not** know your phone number and be prepared to provide them with that information.

Q: Why is the 911 calltaker asking me so many questions?

A: Seconds save lives. The more questions 9-1-1 calltakers ask, the more information they can pass on to the emergency personnel responding to your 9-1-1 call. This information allows the emergency personnel to more accurately prepare. In addition, when dealing with medical calls many 9-1-1 calltakers are trained to give emergency pre-arrival instructions. These instructions start the emergency response to the situation immediately.

Q: While the 911 calltaker is speaking to me is help being sent?

A: Once the basic information and reason for the 9-1-1 call is obtained, the 9-1-1 calltaker stays on the line with the caller and sends information to a Police, Fire, or EMS dispatcher. That person then dispatches, or sends, the appropriate help to the 9-1-1 caller. In many cases, the 9-1-1 calltaker will continue to ask questions, give emergency response information and pass on situation updates to the responding personnel until help arrives at the scene.

Q: Why does the dispatcher transfer my call to another agency?

A: Your call to 9-1-1 may need to be transferred to another agency because cell phone calls are sent to a 9-1-1 answering point based on cell radio coverage. Cell coverage areas don't always match political boundaries, so most calls are routed to a 9-1-1 answering point that serves the majority of the area. Your call *may* need to be transferred to the appropriate agency for the area.

Q: What do I do if I'm cut off after they answer?

A: Always try to call 9-1-1 back. Don't wait for 9-1-1 calltaker to try to contact you. They may not have received your cell phone number in the initial 9-1-1 call and may need additional information.

Q: Can I keep driving when I call 9-1-1 on a cellular phone?

A: It is usually best to pull over when calling 9-1-1, as there is less chance of the cell phone signal being dropped if in a stationary location. Additionally, any emergency instructions that need to be carried out can best be done while stopped. Finally, if help needs to reach you it is best to be in one place so help can get to you, instead of trying to meet them somewhere. If you cannot safely pull over to speak to 9-1-1 then stay calm, pay attention to the roadway with surrounding vehicles, and follow the 9-1-1 calltaker's instructions.

Q: Should I program 9-1-1 or turn on my auto 9-1-1 feature on my cellular phone?

A: **NO**, please don't program 9-1-1 or use the auto 9-1-1 feature. There are numerous accidental calls to 9-1-1 from cell phones that have this feature. The callers often don't realize that their phone has called 9-1-1. Help reduce accidental calls to 9-1-1 by only calling when you have a life-threatening emergency.

How Does 9-1-1 Work?

How Does My Call Get to 9-1-1?

When you call from a phone installed at a residence, business or a pay phone, the phone number of the phone determines which 9-1-1 center you reach. Each 9-1-1 center or Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) has an enormous list of phone numbers that are designated to come to that center. All of these numbers have a special secondary number on file with the phone company that directs your call to the correct 9-1-1 center for your area.

If you call from a cell phone the procedure is slightly different. Cell phones transmit to the nearest cellular tower and from there to the closest 9-1-1 center. The 9-1-1 center is determined by the location of the cell tower. Sometimes if you are close to a county or state border, you might get the wrong 9-1-1 center. However, the employees there will direct your call to the correct center to get the help you need.

In some locations responses for various types of calls may come from more than one jurisdiction. In those cases you might speak to more than one dispatcher, as each 9-1-1 center involved gathers the information they need.

If you are hearing or speech impaired, Otsego County 9-1-1 center is equipped with a Text Telephone (TTY) device to allow communication through your TTY device.

Once you reach 9-1-1, the dispatcher will ask some questions. If you do not have an emergency, the dispatcher will refer you to a non-emergency number.

Non-Emergency Telephone Numbers:

State Police (Otsego County) – 607-432-3211

Otsego County Sheriff – 607-547-4273

Oneonta City Police – 607-432-1111

Cooperstown Police – 607-547-2500

Some of these calls go elsewhere through the non-emergency phone tree, but may be answered by the 9-1-1 dispatchers.

The reason for getting you off the 9-1-1 line is twofold. One, we are trying to send help to the emergencies first, and two, we only have so many 9-1-1 telephone trunks. We want to keep those lines open for emergency calls. If you do have an emergency, the dispatcher will ask you questions to determine who to send.

Some of these questions will be:

- **Where are you?** There are ambulances, fire trucks and police officers all over Otsego County. We want to send the ones who are closest and can provide the quickest help. We really want an exact address, but sometimes you won't know that. We will ask for cross streets, what kind of building it is, what color is it and other questions to help us find you as quickly as possible.
- **What is going on now?** We will ask specific questions related to the situation. Sometimes responders may need special equipment, and not all vehicles carry the same kind of stuff. We want to send you the right help.

While we ask the questions, we are entering the information into a computerized dispatch system. Other dispatchers can see that information and send help to you while we are still talking to you on the phone. **Answering questions does not delay response.** We will often keep you on the phone and obtain more information to give the responders. For example, it often helps the EMS responders on the ambulance to know what kind of medication the patient takes every day. The patient might be having a breathing problem that is unrelated to the medication, but that information will improve the quality of care the paramedics can provide.

We take a large volume of calls per year here at the Otsego County 9-1-1 center. The dispatchers keep track of all the responding units and all of the calls waiting for service. Sometimes it is necessary to change the assignment of a unit so they can respond to a different call that is more of an emergency. On our busiest days, some non-emergency calls can wait for a significant amount of time. Please do not hang up, we have not forgotten you, and we are working as fast as we can.

When to Call 9-1-1

When should I use 9-1-1?

Use 9-1-1 to stop a crime in progress, report a fire, or call for an ambulance. 9-1-1 is the right number to call in an emergency when a prompt response is needed. There could be a fight or an assault occurring right now, a fire burning, or a medical problem occurring now which could be life threatening.

The person who answers your 9-1-1 call is a trained dispatcher. They will ask you questions to determine what kind of help you need - Fire, Police, or Medical. Be prepared to state the nature of the emergency, and please answer all the questions. **Answering questions does not delay response.** As they ask their questions, keep your answers as short and direct as possible.

Questions could include:

- What happened?
- What is the location?
- Where are you calling from?
- What is your name?
- What is your phone number?

While on the phone with the call taker, EMERGENCY help is being dispatched. Staying on the line, if asked to do so, will NOT delay help from responding units. If it is possible and does not compromise your safety, ***do not hang up the phone*** until the 9-1-1 call taker says it is okay to hang up.

What if I call 9-1-1 by mistake?

Please stay on the line if you call 9-1-1 by accident, and tell the dispatcher that everything is OK. If you do not stay on the line we may have to send a police officer to your home to make sure there is not a problem.

When should I use the non-emergency number?

A non-emergency number is a ten digit non-emergency number which you can dial 24 hours a day in Otsego County for non-emergency help. Using the non-emergency number keeps 9-1-1 available for true emergencies.

Non-Emergency Telephone Numbers:

State Police (Otsego County) – 607-432-3211

Otsego County Sheriff – 607-547-4273

Oneonta City Police – 607-432-1111

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Some examples of times when you should call a non-emergency number are:

- Your house or car was broken into yesterday.
- Your runaway child has returned home.
- You need to add additional items to the burglary report you made last week.
- Your car was stolen sometime overnight.
- Someone stole your bike while you were at school.

Are there times when I shouldn't call either number?

Yes. When you need general information, or if you are making routine business inquiries, you should not use either the emergency or the non-emergency number.

Sometimes we receive calls from someone who just doesn't know who to call, or who can't find the right phone number. People call to get directions, to obtain road or weather conditions, to report a power outage, or because they are having trouble finding a phone number in the phone book. These are not 9-1-1 calls, and they are not appropriate calls for the non-emergency number.

A quick response in an emergency depends upon each of us using the emergency system and the non-emergency number properly.