

## Why do the dispatchers ask so many questions when I call 911?

Emergency dispatchers need to get accurate information to allow officers to make the best decision on how to approach the situation. Dispatchers handling fire and paramedic calls must also consider the well-being of the public and the safety of the firefighters and paramedics.

The information you provide a dispatcher is relayed to responding emergency services while they are on their way to the call. This allows them to help make educated decisions about how they respond to the call and what equipment they take with them. We also need to know if you're going to be at, or near, the scene when we arrive because the police may need to talk to you, or you may need to point out the exact location. We may ask you what kind of car you are in, or what color clothing you are wearing.

### ALL 911 CALLS BEGIN:

- What is the address/location of the emergency?  
This is the address where the emergency is actually happening, include room # or suite #, floor, entrance, etc. If you don't know the actual address, tell the dispatcher and then:
  - Give cross streets or provide landmarks, business names or parks near the emergency.
  - Look at the house numbers in the area.
  - If you are calling from inside a home or business, look on a piece of mail.
  - If you are hunting and have a GPS, offer dispatchers the GPS coordinates.
- What is the phone number you're calling from?  
This is the number to the phone you're actually calling from. We need this in case we have to call you back.
  - If you are not at home, do not give home phone number.
  - Know what your cell phone number is.
- What is your name?
- Okay, tell me exactly what happened.  
Tell us exactly what happened. Be as concise as possible. Tell us what just happened, not what led up to the event.
  - "I see a fight on the corner of Broadway and West End.
  - "My ex-boyfriend just kicked my door in."
  - "There is a car accident at mile marker 96 northbound on I-55"

Dispatchers will then ask a series of additional questions to identify what resources to send. Dispatchers can send resources to you even while asking follow up questions, so **answering these questions will not delay help getting to you!** Sometimes the dispatcher may not immediately answer your question because they are keyed up talking to the police or fire. The 911 system automatically mutes the microphone to the caller when the dispatcher is talking on the radio.

## Police Calls

You will be asked a series of questions that will help determine the response of police to the call, including how many units and what type of equipment they will bring in with them initially. Dispatchers will also be able to provide caller with steps to take until help arrives.

- Are you at the location now?
- When did this happen?

Dispatchers will ask additional questions based on your answers to these questions. For example, if you report a suspicious person/incident/vehicle at your place of business, the dispatchers may ask:

- Does the person appear to have a weapon?
- What is suspicious about the person/incident/vehicle?
- Can you give me a description of the person/incident/vehicle?
  - Male/Female
  - White/Black/Hispanic/Asian
  - Short/tall, heavy/thin
  - Beard, bald, hair color and style such as blonde pony tail or dark shoulder length, etc.
  - Jacket, shirt, pants
  - Boots, Tennis shoes, sandals
  - Leave on foot or in vehicle
- Where is the suspect/person now?
  - Direction of travel
  - Vehicle Information
    - Color – if unknown was it light or dark
    - Year – newer or older
    - Make/Model – Honda Accord or Ford F150
    - Additional – Toolbox, window decals, bumper stickers, broken window, noticeable damage, etc.
    - License – Plate and state – even partial info helps

## Medical Calls

You will be asked a series of questions that will help determine the response of paramedics to the call, including how many units and what type of equipment they will bring in with them initially. Dispatchers will also be able to provide caller with steps to take until help arrives.

- Are you with the patient now?
- How many people are hurt/sick?
- How old is the patient?
- Is patient conscious and breathing?

Dispatchers will ask additional questions based on your answers to these questions. For example, if you call for a patient that has fallen off of a roof, the dispatcher may ask:

- How far did s/he fall?
- What caused the fall?
- Is there any serious bleeding?
- What part of the body was injured?
- When did the fall happen?

### Fire Calls

You will be asked a series of questions that will help determine the response of the fire department to the call, including how many units and what type of equipment they will bring in with them initially. Dispatchers will also be able to provide caller with steps to take until help arrives.

For example, if you report that you smell smoke in the building you are in, the dispatcher may ask:

- Do you see flames or smoke?
- What type of building is involved?
- How many floors or stories?
- Is anyone inside the building?

### Why would a 911 caller be put on hold?

- We may be getting multiple calls on the same incident and need to make sure that the other 911 calls aren't callers with more information or another emergency.
- We may need to transfer caller to another agency. We receive calls from Talbot County, Caroline County, Wicimico County, Calvert County and Seaford DE.
- You will not get a busy signal if you call 911 on the mid-shore. If our 911 center is overwhelmed, your call will automatically go to the next available operator in our neighboring counties who can take your information and get it to us so we can send help.
- We may need to verify information to be certain that the correct responders are sent. It is better to put the caller on hold briefly than to transfer to another agency and the caller is then transferred again.