

Understanding how your 9-1-1 Call Center operates is an important component of emergency preparedness! This is especially important for individuals with hearing loss.



“9-1-1. What is the address of your emergency?”

The first thing the Call Taker must do is verify the address of the emergency so that help can be sent. If you lose consciousness or are cut off, the Call Taker will still be able to dispatch help to the appropriate location. Even if your Call Center has Enhanced 9-1-1 features (e.g., ANI/ALI: Automatic Number Indicator/Automatic Location Indicator), the Call Taker will want to verify the address of the emergency.

“What is the problem? Tell me exactly what happened.”

Next, the Call Taker will want to know the nature of the emergency; that is, is it a police, fire, or medical emergency? 9-1-1 Call Centers follow a carefully developed protocol.

You may be tempted to tell the Call Taker that your husband is having chest pains, and it might be indigestion because of what he ate but it seems worse tonight. Don't! The Call Taker wants to know if he is turning blue, becoming clammy, or has pain running down his arm. You should let the Call Taker ask you questions, and *briefly* answer. Your responses are logged into a computer system and sent to the responding unit.

What Does this Mean for Hard-of-Hearing Callers?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that telephone emergency services provide *direct access* to individuals who use TTYs and computer modems. This is a boon for TTY users; but VCO and other Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) customers may still have difficulty. When you call 7-1-1 (the nationwide TRS number), the communication assistant (CA) answering is in another state. When you ask the CA to call 9-1-1, he or she will have to ask you where you live and look up the 10-digit emergency services number for your area (they can't just dial 9-1-1, because *their* local Call Center would respond).

Also, the equipment used in relay calls generally allows for communication in one direction. If you launch into irrelevant medical history, you will not be interrupted (the CA may not be able to hear the 9-1-1 Call Taker trying to interrupt), and life-saving assistance may be delayed.

9-1-1 Tips

1. If you have a TTY, use it to call 9-1-1 direct. Because of the ADA, silent calls may automatically be switched to TTY mode after the question (“9-1-1. What is the address of your emergency?”) has been asked twice. With some systems, if you hit your space bar 4 times within 4 seconds, it will automatically switch the Call Taker's system to TTY mode. Check with your call center to find out how it is handled in your area.
2. If you don't understand the question, say so! If you don't respond to the question, the Call Taker will keep repeating it until you do!
3. Call the 9-1-1 *non-emergency* number in your phonebook to find out if Enhanced 9-1-1 service is provided in your home and office. Remember, some business phone systems, like PBX, display a central office address rather than the actual location of the phone you are calling from.
4. The equipment found in Call Centers will vary. Some will have TTYs and some will have a computer system that can be toggled between voice and TTY mode. Either way, ask if the Call Takers have been trained in VCO. If they understand the concept of using GA and different ways the caller might be making the call (e.g., via a special phone with a screen, or using a phone in tandem with a TTY), VCO users won't need to go through TRS in an emergency.

5. Find out from your relay service provider how they handle 9-1-1 calls in general, and if they are able to forward your ANI/ALI information to your 9-1-1 Call Center.
6. If you cannot hear on the phone but can speak, dial 9-1-1, state that you are deaf, your location, if you need fire, medical, or police assistance, and what the emergency is. (e.g., "I am deaf and I cannot hear you. My name is Mary Jones. I'm at 345 ABC Street off Main St. I need an ambulance. My son fell out of a tree and is unconscious. I'll keep repeating this because I cannot hear you. My name is...")
7. Don't hang up! Recognize that the line may ring many times on your end of the phone before the call taker ever hears the first ring. This is because the 9-1-1 call is first directed to the national 9-1-1 Call Center, then directed to the center with the ANI/ALI information, then directed to the local 9-1-1 Call Center. Our local Call Center reports that callers may hear as many as nine rings before the call reaches their center.
8. If you can hear enough to use an amplified phone, make the effort to find a cordless phone that works for you. This can reduce a great deal of stress if you are in a situation where you need to follow instructions from the Call Taker.
9. Take a CPR class...better yet, get your SHHH group to sponsor a CPR class. If you feel nervous about it, remember: You don't have to do CPR

very well to still be able to save a life! These classes include basic medical information like how to stop bleeding.

10. Post information like this to your SHHH website, and have your local 9-1-1 Call Center do the same.
11. If you do use the relay service, ask the Call Taker to repeat your address. There have been instances where information was read incorrectly to the Call Taker resulting in a delayed response time.
12. Volunteer to work with your local Call Center to ensure that both the primary and secondary call centers (e.g., sheriff's offices) are able to handle TTY/VCO calls. You'll learn a lot and provide a valuable service to

When Seconds Count! Becoming 9-1-1 Savvy



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