

The History of the number "9-1-1"

"9-1-1" is the three digit telephone number that has been designated as the "Universal Emergency Number," for public use throughout the United States to request emergency assistance. It is intended as a nationwide telephone number giving the public direct access to a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) which will be responsible for taking the appropriate action.

In the United States, the first catalyst for a nationwide emergency telephone number gained momentum in 1957 when the National Association of Fire Chiefs recommended use of a single number for reporting fires nationwide.

In 1967, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice recommended that a "single number should be established" nationwide for reporting emergency situations. The use of different telephone numbers for each type of emergency was determined to be contrary to the purpose of a single, universal number. Other Federal Government Agencies and various governmental officials also supported and encouraged the recommendation. As a result of the immense interest in this issue, the President's Commission on Civil Disorders turned to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for a solution.

In November of 1967 the FCC met with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) to find a means of establishing a universal emergency number that could be implemented quickly. In 1968, AT&T announced that it would establish the digits 9-1-1 (nine-one-one) as emergency code throughout the United States.

The code 9-1-1 was chosen because it best fit the needs of all parties involved. First, and most important, it meets public requirements because it is brief, easily remembered, and can be dialed quickly. Second, because it is a unique number, never having been authorized as an office code, area code, or service code, it best meets the long range numbering plans and switching configurations of the telephone industry.

Congress backed AT&T's proposal and passed legislation allowing use of only the numbers 9-1-1 when creating a single emergency calling service, thereby making 9-1-1 a standard emergency number nationwide. A bell System policy was established to absorb the cost of central office modifications and any additions necessary to accommodate the 9-1-1 code as part of the general rate base. The 9-1-1 subscriber is responsible for paying network trunking costs according to tariffed rates, and for purchasing answering equipment from the vendor of their choice.

On February 16, 1968, Senator Rankin Fite completed the first 9-1-1 call to be made in the United States in Hallyville, Alabama. The serving telephone company was Alabama Telephone Company, which later became Contel Corporation. This 9-1-1 system is still in operation today.

General Operations/When and how to use 9-1-1

9-1-1 is simply a telephone number used for reporting all types of emergencies - police, fire and emergency medical.

9-1-1 makes reporting emergencies fast and easy:

- the 3 digit number makes it easy to remember - you no longer waste time looking up the correct number to dial in an emergency!
- the 3 digit number makes it fast to dial - dialing 3 numbers is obviously quicker than dialing 7 numbers.
- DO NOT program 9-1-1 into speed dials - WHY? 9-1-1 is fast and easy to dial as it is. Placing it in speed dials often results in "accidental" calls to 9-1-1.
- 9-1-1 is the correct number to dial no matter where you are in Cambria, Indiana, Bedford, Blair, Westmoreland, Clearfield or Somerset counties.
- 9-1-1 is the correct number to dial no matter if the emergency you are reporting is for police, fire, or emergency medical services.
- 9-1-1 is equipped and ready to accept calls from deaf persons utilizing a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD)

● 9-1-1 is for emergencies only. If you call 9-1-1 for non-emergency reports, someone with a real emergency might not get through! When away from your home remember 9-1-1 is coin free from a pay telephone.

What is an emergency?

A fire, an automobile accident, a robbery, a burglary, a prowler outside your home, when someone is sick or injured so badly that they need to go to the hospital.

Non-emergency calls should be placed on normal telephone numbers which may be found in the telephone book. The numbers for Cambria County are: in the Ebensburg area - 472-2100; anywhere else in the county 800-281-1680. Calls on these lines are answered at the same location, by the same dispatchers, but they don't tie up the "special" 9-1-1 lines.

If you need to dial 9-1-1 remember:

1. Stay calm! Before picking up the phone, take a deep breath and do your best to relax.
2. Pick up the phone, listen for dial tone, then dial 9-1-1. That's all, just three numbers - 9 - 1 - 1.
3. When the dispatcher answers, simply state what you need; I need the police, I want to report a fire, I need an ambulance.
4. The dispatcher will then ask for the address or location of the emergency. This is very important! Do you and other members of your family / workforce all know your address? If not, let everyone know! Better yet, mark the address by each telephone - that way it will be easy to remember. Do you know what city, township or borough you are located in? This is important information as well. In addition to knowing your address, it is important that emergency responders can see your house number from the street. The next time you are returning to your home at night, pretend that you are a policeman or firefighter trying to find your house. Can you easily see your house number from the street? If not, you have some work to do. Mark your house number in large, reflective numbers that can easily be seen from the street.
5. Next, the dispatcher will ask you exactly what is wrong - the "details" of your emergency. This is important information too! Do not become upset that it is "taking too long", or that "they are asking too many questions" REMEMBER, while one dispatcher is talking to you on the phone, another dispatcher is putting your call out on radio to the emergency personnel.
6. Finally, the dispatcher will ask your name and telephone number.
7. DO NOT hang up until the dispatcher says it is okay. If you are alone or frightened, we'll stay on the phone until help arrives.
8. For medical emergencies, the dispatcher can tell you what to do until the ambulance arrives.