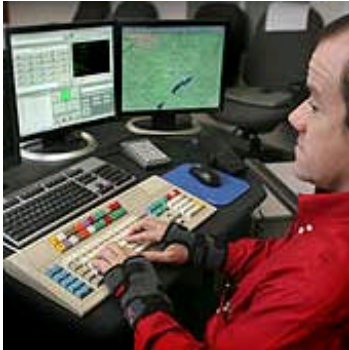


This is a printer-friendly version. The navigation and other unnecessary elements have been removed.



READY TO HELP: The shift of wireless 911 calls from the CHP to local safety agencies could ease the workload of CHP public safety dispatchers like Chris Little, above. Wireless calls from freeways will still be routed to CHP dispatchers.

BRUCE CHAMBERS, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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Graphic: 911 calls hit the fast lane safety



Call 911 on the road when:

- Accidents are in lanes (not the side of the road)
- You see a reckless driver or one who is driving erratically
- There are hazards in the roadway

Tips for using cellular 911:

- Know where you are calling from.

- Look for a landmark or street name.
- Stay calm and speak clearly.
- Listen for and answer the dispatcher's questions.
- Stay on the phone until you are told it is OK to hang up.

Non-emergency police numbers

Here are non-emergency telephone numbers to use for CHP, police and sheriff's departments in Orange County.

The agencies ask that you program the appropriate numbers into your cell phone.

Anaheim: 714-765-1900

Brea: 714-990-7625

Buena Park: 714-562-3902

Cal State Fullerton: 714-278-2515

Costa Mesa: 714-754-5100

Cypress: 562-795-5410

Fountain Valley: 714-593-4485

Fullerton: 714-593-4485

Garden Grove: 714-741-5704

Huntington Beach: 714-960-8825

Irvine: 949-724-7000

La Habra: 562-905-9750

La Palma: 714-690-3370

Laguna Beach: 949-497-0701

Los Alamitos: 562-795-5410

Newport Beach: 949-644-3717

Orange: 714-744-7444

Placentia: 714-993-8164

Santa Ana: 714-245-8665

Seal Beach: 562-795-5410

Tustin: 714-573-3225

UCI: 949-824-5223

Westminster: 714-898-3315 x326

Yorba Linda: 714-990-7625

CHP – for all of O.C.: 714-559-7888

Statewide road conditions: 800-427-7623

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

A wireless win-win

911 callers could get faster service from local safety agencies, easing CHP dispatchers' workload.

By KIMBERLY EDDS and CINDY CARCAMO
The Orange County Register

Motorists who run into trouble and dial 911 on their cellular phones now have a better chance of getting faster and more efficient service.

In the past, the California Highway Patrol managed all emergency wireless calls and then routed them to the appropriate agency. The lag time and bumpy process meant the second agency sometimes received incomplete information and callers had to repeat details of their emergency.

Some callers became disconnected because the cell signal dropped off by the time they got transferred. Other callers never even got through to the jam-packed CHP dispatch center, getting a busy signal instead.

A state initiative in 2001 gave local agencies the option to take over emergency wireless calls currently handled by the CHP. In turn, federal officials required cellular phone providers to include locator technology on their phones by 2005.

Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego and Sacramento started testing the system more than two years ago. Los Angeles announced its completion last month.

Orange County was part of the fifth region to begin testing the technology, according to a schedule rolled out by the state.

Dispatchers in all but two Orange County cities are now receiving wireless emergency calls. La Palma's system is near completion; Placentia plans to overhaul its communications system and hopes to receive 911 calls by the end of next year.

The new technology means fewer upset wireless callers, said Irvine police dispatcher Kasandra Bowden.

Sometimes important information got lost in the handoff, Bowden said. For instance, a caller reporting a reckless driver would give the vehicle's license plate number to the CHP but forget the number by the time they'd get to Bowden. "It makes it easier for them and us." Bowden said.

Where did 911 wireless calls go before?

Before 2005, all 911 calls made on cell phones in Orange County were routed to the California Highway Patrol Communications Center in Irvine, flooding dispatchers with 1 million calls a year.

CHP dispatchers would screen the calls and reroute them to the appropriate agency.

Where do they go now?

Emergency calls are routed to the dispatch center in the city where the call originated.

For example, 911 calls made in the city of Orange are answered by a dispatcher for the Orange Police Department.

What if I dial 911 while I'm on the freeway?

Calls dialed from cell phones on the freeway will be routed to CHP dispatchers.

Calls made near freeways, such as under a freeway overpass, also are likely to be picked up by the CHP.

How can I be sure my call will be transferred to the right police or fire department?

Since 2003, the CHP has been working with the county's 23 law-enforcement and two fire dispatch centers to hand off the bulk of 911 calls to local dispatchers.

A team of people from state and local agencies and the five main cell phone providers surveyed all 1,900 cell towers.

Now when wireless callers dial 911, their network routes them to the police agency that has jurisdiction.

What if I'm calling near the border of two cities? Which agency will it go to?

Some cell-phone towers border more than one city and are very close to freeways.

That's why neighboring cities and CHP officials sat down with huge maps months ago and

agreed on the areas for which they would be responsible.

So there is a possibility that calls made near city borders may not get to the appropriate agency.

Will my number show up if I have a blocked number?

Yes, law-enforcement agencies can access all cell phone numbers, including blocked numbers. Having that information will help officers find people in need of help more quickly and efficiently.

Are all cell phones equipped with locator technology?

The Federal Communications Commission requires the five major cell phone providers to equip all cell phones sold after 2005 with locator technology.

Older cell phones that are serviced or traded in will be outfitted with locator technology.

What happens if I don't have one of the five major wireless providers?

Cell phone customers from outside the area will have their call picked up by local providers and charged roaming fees.

All cell phones are required by law to be able to dial 911, even if they are not activated.

How does this new system help officers get help to me faster?

A new mapping system helps dispatchers pinpoint the approximate location of a caller based on the cell phone tower used to make the call.

Dispatchers will be given a latitude and longitude of the caller's location.

The goal is to track down a caller's location within 164 feet of where the call originated.

What were the difficulties with the older system? CHP officials say they were inundated with so many wireless 911 calls that some calls never got through.

In addition, some callers would lose their signal and drop off by the time CHP dispatchers transferred the call to the appropriate agency.

Are there any Orange County cities that haven't started taking 911 wireless calls? When will those departments make the change?

La Palma and Placentia police departments have not finished the process.

La Palma just installed the mapping equipment and will begin testing the system shortly.

The Placentia Police Department is working on upgrading its system and should be handling 911 wireless calls by sometime next year.

Who is paying for this?

State funds from the Department of General Services 911 fund will pay for the purchase and installation of Wireless Mapping technology to interface with police agencies' current dispatch systems.

Contact the writer: 714-796-7829 or ccarcamo@oregister.com or kedds@oregister.com

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