

Stanislaus Regional 911

Stanislaus County began planning and preparation for installation of its 9-1-1 system in the mid 1970's. This plan included taking the separate dispatch centers that were in existence in the county and joining them into the center. From that idea, the County Communications Department was formed in 1978. Employees of the agencies that chose to become part of the Comm. Center then became county employees. In 1979 the dispatchers moved into the basement of the County Administration Building at 1100 H St. By 1981, the Communications Center was fully operational with an on line CAD system. Agencies that did not join the consolidated center were the cities of Oakdale and Turlock, and Ceres Police. Several computer changes and a few cosmetic changes later, the center, or Emergency Dispatch as it was called was functioning as the main PSAP for Stanislaus County.

In 1997 the center began to look for a new home. An AT&T building was purchased and plans were set into motion to move and upgrade the entire operation. In November 2000 the dream became a reality. The new "JPA," or Joint Powers Agreement, took affect and "Stanislaus Regional 911" opened its doors with new telephone and radio equipment. The only thing that was not new was the CAD system that went through a facelift, but remained functionally the same.

Oakdale City Fire joined the dispatch operation in 2001. At present all fire and law enforcement dispatches are done from this center with the exception of Oakdale City Police, Ceres City Police, and Turlock City Fire and Police. We continue to grow as the population of the county grows. AT&T figures that a PSAP will handle on an average one call per resident of the area per year and that is ringing true here.

Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 services Stanislaus County, the heartland of the Central Valley located just 90 minutes from two of the largest consumer and industrial marketplaces - San Francisco and the Silicon Valley. Stanislaus County offers a mix of rural communities, a metropolitan city, and a moderate climate conducive to many outdoor activities and adventure. Stanislaus Regional 9-1-1 provides twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week public safety emergency dispatch service, and is the focal point for the 911-telephone system. Dispatching is handled by six radio console positions that operate 24x7 and dispatch for 22 Law Enforcement and Fire agencies within Stanislaus County, including Modesto Police Department and the Stanislaus County Sheriffs Department.

- We provide Enhanced 911 and non-emergency call processing for unincorporated county areas and most of the cities. We don't currently provide this service for the cities of Oakdale, Ceres, and Turlock.
- We also provide fire and law enforcement dispatching for unincorporated county areas (Sheriff, Consolidated Fire, and rural fire districts); and most incorporated cities. We don't currently provide these services for the cities of Oakdale (law), Ceres, (law), and Turlock (law and fire).
- After hours public works response.

- We also work closely with the Emergency Operations Command Center during times of local emergency, like the floods of 1997. We strive to provide our normal level of service to the community during critical times like this while assisting the EOC in matters of communication and organization.
- We dispatch law enforcement and fire personnel for most cities and rural areas in the county. We strive to maintain standardized procedures while respecting each agency's individual requirements.
- We provide reports on response times; call counts, and other special information to assist the agencies with maintaining a superior level of community service. We also provide reporting to assist the agencies with special operations or research.
- We log phone and radio communications, and provide them along with computer printouts when subpoenaed for court cases.
- We provide access to state and federal law enforcement networks for all county agencies.
- We also provide moderate computer support for all agencies with terminals that hook into our system.

How We Prioritize Calls

We use a simple and effective method for prioritizing calls. Anything in progress is top priority. A home burglary in progress is dispatched before a home burglary that occurred last night. Anything that is life threatening also takes top priority. A fight with weapons (anything wielded against another person is considered a weapon) is dispatched before a verbal dispute. Anything that involves children under 12 takes very high priority. A lost child call is taken immediately, whereas a missing adult may be referred to the person's city police department (if out of our jurisdiction).

Calls endangering property are dispatched as soon as possible if units are available, with the exception of fires and bomb threats that are dispatched immediately. Vandalism and burglary calls may be delayed until officers are available. Also, calls about persons who are injured some time prior will be responded to when units are available. This is unfortunate because, for example, we frequently receive calls from rape victims where the rape occurred weeks or months before, so immediate response will not help the victim.

We receive so many calls each day for a wide variety of calls, many of which are not top priority that often the lower priority calls must be held for some time until officers or deputies are available. We try to minimize the waiting time, but during very busy days, it is difficult to respond to every family fight, business alarm call, and other calls within a short period of time. Also, frequently an officer may be enroute to take your report on a burglary that occurred last week, when he's suddenly preempted to respond to an assault and battery call. Anything in progress that is life threatening will take priority over a normal dispatched call, even if the officer is already enroute. We cannot actually tell you why he was preempted, but please understand that it is always for a very good reason. For a better picture of the call load we handle in our County, see our page of statistics.

SR-911 F.A.Q.: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How come you know my address and phone number when I call?

A: We have what is called "E911" or enhanced 911 capabilities at our center. That means that our computer-aided dispatch system has a link to the local telephone company's computer. When we answer the phone, a computer display shows the billing name, address, and number of the telephone on the other end.

Q: You already know my address and phone number, so why do you ask me anyway?

A: Computers are wonderful, but not infallible. They do make mistakes, so we must ask just to make sure. Another possibility is that many people call from a neighbor's house, so we don't want to send help to the wrong place and waste precious time.

Q: Why do you ask so many irrelevant questions when I call 911?

A: We ask questions pertaining to the location of an incident and descriptions of vehicles and people involved. Often we ask for descriptions of the victim's clothing as well as the suspect's clothing. This is to make sure that the officers who respond know which people are which. At times we also need to know if a crime is still occurring, or if it has occurred some time ago, in order to judge if the suspects are still near the crime scene, or if the officers need to go searching for them.

Q: Why can't you just send help instead of keeping me on the phone?

A: In an emergency, you are likely to be highly upset or even frantic. But remember that most often while you are speaking to the call-taker, help is being dispatched, and may be enroute to your location. Sometimes the call-taker will keep you on the phone to try to keep you calm and occupied until help arrives. Sometimes they will even tell you what you can do to help the victim until help arrives. The best thing you can do is to be responsive and don't try to fight the call-taker or hang up on him or her. If you've hung up before all the necessary information is relayed, you may delay the arrival of help!

Q: Why do you ask me the same questions over and over?

A: We try to be as efficient and quick as possible. The only time we repeat questions is when the caller is too frantic to be understood. We understand that when a crisis occurs it's human nature to get upset, but when you scream, cry, or curse at us and we can't get the necessary information; you are just delaying the help you desperately need. Try to speak clearly and answer our questions completely.

Q: When should I call 911?

A: Anything that has just occurred or is still in progress that could be life threatening; a medical emergency that needs an ambulance, a fire, or any incident that has injuries or unknown injuries.

Q: When should I NOT call 911?

A: Anything that has occurred prior (like yesterday, days before, or even weeks before!),

the responsible party is gone, a report for insurance purposes only, or if no person or property is in danger.

Q: Can I still get 911 if I dial the operator?

A: Yes. You get connected to 911; however, when you are connected through the operator we do not get your address or phone number on our enhanced 911 screens. (Many of us did not have 911 when we grew up and we would call the operator who would then transfer us to police, fire, or ambulance when needed.) By not dialing 911 it slows down the process by preventing us from simply verifying your address. When you call in an emergency, you are often upset, afraid, and not always thinking rationally. As a result you will sometimes forget your address, and we cannot get help to you until that address is determined.

Q: What happens when I call 911 accidentally and hang up?

A: The dispatcher will try to call you back. If the dispatcher reaches a child on the phone, he/she will ask to speak to an adult. An officer will be dispatched to the residence if no adult can be reached. If no one answers, an officer will be dispatched. If the line is busy, the dispatcher will attempt to break through with the help of an operator to see if it was a misdial or there is an emergency needing help.

Q: Why can't you just take my non-emergency call on 911 when we are both on the line already?

A: We only have 15 incoming 911 lines for the entire county. Any major incident will cause numerous lines to ring regarding this one incident. (Large fire, major traffic accident, etc.) Those 15 lines can get tied up quickly. If we are taking your non-emergency call also on 911, a real emergency caller may reach a busy signal.