

9-1-1 Never Sleeps

The setting is the Stratford Public Safety Communications Center where 9-1-1 operators are staffed around the clock 24/7/365. It is 08:15 in the morning.

9-1-1 Operator: "Stratford 9-1-1. What is the address of the emergency?"

Caller: "425 Johnson Boulevard"

9-1-1 Operator: "What number are you calling from?"

Caller: "555-1212"

9-1-1 Operator: "Tell me exactly what happened."

Caller: "My husband woke me up about 4 a.m. and said he was having trouble breathing. He didn't want me to bother anyone because he thought it would get better but it's much worse now."

9-1-1 operators, also called dispatchers, receive calls like this every day - calls from people who delay calling 9-1-1 because they "don't want to bother anyone" or because they rely on family and friends to help in emergencies. ***In emergency situations, early intervention is critical.*** Minutes, even seconds, make a difference.

9-1-1 operators, police, fire, and emergency medical staff are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, including holidays, to respond to 9-1-1 calls. 9-1-1 operators stress the importance of calling 9-1-1 ***first*** for emergencies.

Here are some questions and answers to help you use 9-1-1 appropriately:

Question #1: When should I call 9-1-1?

Answer: Call 9-1-1 for emergencies! An emergency is when immediate police, fire or medical assistance is needed to protect life or property. Call 9-1-1:

- To report a serious crime or a missing person
- To report a fire or serious motor vehicle accident
- To report any medical emergency

Question #2: When shouldn't I call 9-1-1?

Answer: You shouldn't call 9-1-1 to ask when the fireworks are or to complain about a neighbor's loud music. These are *not emergencies*. Phone numbers for town offices are listed in the blue pages of the phone book. The routine line for the Stratford Police Department (also answered by Town of Stratford Dispatchers) is **203-385-4100**.

Question #3: What if I'm not sure if a situation is an emergency?

Answer: When in doubt, ***always*** call 9-1-1. As part of their training, 9-1-1 operators are trained to determine whether a situation is an emergency or not.

Question #4: Is there another number I can call for non-emergency information?

Answer: Connecticut residents can call **2-1-1** (Infoline) for many different types of help. Professional call specialists help callers with such complex issues as substance abuse, gambling, domestic violence programs, suicide prevention, financial problems, and much more. The most frequently requested services are: Financial Assistance, Food, Protective Services, Legal Assistance, Child Care, Utilities, Heat, Social Support, Housing, and Mental Health. Infoline's staff is also available 24 hours a day.

Question #5: Does it matter if I call 9-1-1 from my home phone or cell phone?

Answer: The answer is yes and no. If you call 9-1-1 from a cell phone, you will still reach a 9-1-1 dispatcher as long as you have cell service, but it may not be in the town or city you are in. Cell phone technology allows the 9-1-1 system to *rarely* plot a location and *sometimes* provide a callback number. If you have a choice always call 9-1-1 from your home phone. This will *guarantee* you reach the most appropriate dispatch center plus it will provide your phone number and address automatically via the ANI/ALI technology. Even if you dial 9-1-1 and then put the phone down, someone will be on the way to help.

“What’s with all the questions? I just want an ambulance!”

The Connecticut Legislature passed a law which requires all Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs or 9-1-1 Communication Centers) use a system called Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) for every medical call they receive. This system is used throughout the world and has become an international public expectation.

The EMD System is a series of **IMPORTANT** questions, which the dispatcher asks the caller in order to determine:

- What the medical situation is
- If intervention is needed immediately.
- What resources need to be dispatched
- How the resources should respond (Lights and sirens or with the flow of traffic)
- If pre-arrival instructions need to be given to the caller (CPR, child birth, etc)

The EMD System is based upon a patient’s “signs and symptoms,” not upon specific diagnosis. The dispatcher will ask questions like:

- Address (most important)
- Call Back number
- What’s the problem, tell me exactly what happened.
- Age/Sex of Patient (sixties, seventies, teens, if exact age isn’t know)
- Is the patient conscious?
- Is the patient breathing?

Based on the answer to the above questions, more specific questions will be asked. When the caller is not with the patient or does not know the answers to the questions, it can generate a higher level of response and tie up resources unnecessarily. It’s helpful to have as much information about the patient as you can when you call.

The most important thing to remember is that an ambulance **IS BEING SENT** even if the dispatcher is still asking you questions or assisting you in helping someone. **THE QUESTIONS ARE NOT DELAYING THE DISPATCH OF HELP!**



Questions? Call J.P. Sredzinski at 203-381-2087
Or visit: <http://www.stratfordems.org/services/dispatch/>

This article was written by Town of Stratford Public Safety Dispatch Supervisor J.P. Sredzinski along with the 9-1-1 Accessibility Workgroup with representatives from: Avon PD, Brookfield PD, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, City of Hartford, Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, Cromwell PD, DEMHS, DPS, DSS - Aging Services Division, Groton ECC, NENA - CT Chapter, New Fairfield ECC, New Haven Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities, New Haven ERC, Norwalk PD, Norwich PD, Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, Trumbull PD & Westport PD.