

E-911 System



The 911 system is based on a nationally approved emergency reporting program designed to speed the response of public safety agencies and reduce delays caused by citizens who are trying to get help in an emergency. Today, some type of 911 systems serves most of Florida.

There is now one 911 center that serve Gainesville and the surrounding area. Calls from both inside and outside the City of Gainesville are received by the Alachua County Consolidated Communications Center next to the Sheriff's Office at 2621 SE Hawthorne Road. From there calls for service are dispatched to the [Alachua County Sheriff's Office](#), [Gainesville Police Department](#), [Gainesville Fire Rescue](#) and [Alachua County Fire Rescue](#).

The 911 system is funded by fees charged to residential and business telephone customers. In Gainesville and Alachua County, each telephone subscriber pays fifty cents a month on their telephone bill to maintain each 911 system. When a caller dials 911, special computers reference customer information and display it instantly at the 911 operator's work station. Even if the caller can't speak, the computer will show the name, telephone number and address assigned to that phone. Although this information is displayed each time a caller dials 911, the emergency operator is trained to ask for address information. This verifies that the computer's information is correct and makes sure that you are calling from the location that needs assistance. Many times a citizen will go to another location to report an emergency or will call a relative or friend who then will call for help. The 911 system is designed to assist citizens with any type of emergency call. The emergency response agencies include fire rescue, law enforcement, ambulance, poison control, marine patrol, forestry and the crisis center

The Work of a 911 Operator:

Operators for the 911 system are highly trained individuals who answer emergency calls for help from citizens who need law enforcement, emergency medical or fire rescue assistance. Before 911 operators are allowed to handle emergency telephone calls, they go through more than 400 hours of training. This training occurs in both a classroom setting and in a laboratory setting where employees practice processing emergency calls using computers. Each employee also receives eight hours of ongoing training each month. Operators must be able to make rapid decisions and have good communication skills that will allow them to obtain critical information from callers. The job is very stressful, and the pace can change at a moment's notice.

Employees work shifts to provide coverage seven days a week, 365 days a year. A typical shift in the 911 center will include three operators, along with personnel who actually dispatch responding units. During a normal 24-hour period, the 911 center will process more than 400 emergency calls. All of these calls are handled by operators who determine the agency that may be able to help a caller best.

All information is processed using high speed computers that track the status and position of each call. There are many different computer systems available to the 911 operator to help obtain information on calls. The ability to type quickly is critical. Entry level employees must be able to type at least 35 correct words per minute on a computer keyboard. To be eligible for employment, an applicant also must have a high school diploma, one year of documented experience using computers and a year of documented experience in dealing with the public.

When to Dial 911 and What to Say

The 911 system provides quick and efficient activation of public safety resources in the event of an emergency. Many citizens have different ideas about what is, and what is not, an emergency. This can create two problems. In some cases, citizens will dial 911 to report routine police assistance and will tie up emergency telephone lines that may be needed by other citizens who are reporting emergencies. In other cases, a citizen will not dial 911 because they don't think the incident is an emergency. When the call should have been reported to the 911 center, precious time is lost while the call is screened by a switchboard operator or other employee who finally transfers the call to the 911 center for proper handling. To avoid confusion over when to use 911, we tell citizens to remember a simple rule: If you need a fire rescue unit, police officer or an ambulance to come to your assistance right now, you dial 911. This rule requires citizens to know they are in an emergency situation. In a recent national survey, citizens indicated that they would not use 911 to report many calls that public safety agencies would prefer to receive at the 911 center; including reports of fires, persons who had fainted and suspicious persons seen inside a neighbor's garage. However, even though the citizen didn't think the problem was an emergency, in all cases they expected the agency to respond immediately to investigate or handle the problem. Here is also another rule we tell citizens: If you are in doubt, dial 911. The 911 operator will process the call immediately or direct it to the non-emergency line. The 911 operator will always answer the phone with the standard phrase, "911, what is your emergency?" This phrase is designed to alert callers that they have dialed 911, as opposed to directory assistance or long distance, and should make the caller announce what type of problem they are reporting. While most calls are handled by the 911 operator, who first answers the call, some emergencies require that the caller be transferred to another agency. For example, any caller who needs an ambulance must be connected to the sheriff's office 911 center, since all ambulances are dispatched by the Alachua County Sheriff's Office. In other cases, the caller may need to be transferred to an agency that provides specialized services, such as the Poison Control Center or the Crisis Center. It is important that citizens follow the operator's instructions carefully. The operator will ask a variety of questions to determine what is happening (the type of emergency), where is it happening (the exact location where help is needed) and when did it happen (how long ago). Operators also ask questions to better determine how urgent the situation is, which will help responding agencies determine which call units will respond to first. Finally, operators will provide assistance and direct the caller on specific instructions they should follow until help arrives. This assistance could be to tell a citizen to evacuate a building or instructions on how to provide emergency first aid until trained help arrives. Sometimes citizens do not understand why the operator must ask so many questions. The worst thing a caller can do is just hang up the phone. It is almost impossible for a public safety agency to send the correct units at the fastest time if they do not have proper information about what is occurring at the scene of an emergency. Callers should follow the instructions of the operator and ask questions to clarify any instructions that they do not understand. You should not hang up the phone until you are told to do so by the 911 operator.