



## **9-1-1 what's the address of your emergency?**

A Fact sheet provided by the Cunningham Fire Protection District

Recently a metro area fire department and police department spent nearly six-hours searching for a person that was having a medical emergency and dialed 9-1-1. How could this happen you ask? The person was using a cell phone. The emergency dispatcher painstakingly tried to determine the physical location of the caller using the technology of the 9-1-1 system; however, because the caller was using a cell phone the ability of the 9-1-1 system to pinpoint the location of the person experiencing the emergency was compromised. The fact that the person was also impaired by their medical condition and he could not provide accurate information about where he was compounded the problem. The person was eventually found on the opposite side of the metro area– nearly 20 miles away– in the middle of a large open space far from the jurisdiction to where the call was routed. The outcome of this particular emergency was positive and because the person was not near a building or a hard wire phone, the use of a cell phone was the best means available. However, this incident does bring to light the limitations of using a cell phone or VOIP (voice over internet) to call 9-1-1 and the importance of providing accurate information to the dispatcher.

One of the first questions a dispatcher will ask you when you dial 9-1-1 is: *What is the location of your emergency?* Why is this question necessary? If the dispatcher can't find you or verify you location, the dispatcher can not send the appropriate help where it is needed.

When using a cell phone to call 9-1-1, it is a roll of the dice as to whether the call will be routed to the appropriate jurisdiction. Although the Enhanced 9-1-1 system provides the dispatcher with a display when a person calls 9-1-1, the information on the display depends on the type of phone the call is being placed on. For example, if you place a call from a hard wire phone from your residence the dispatcher *should* receive the name of the caller (the name on the phone bill), the location of the hard wire phone, and a call back phone number. This information should be accurate; however, if you have recently moved or changed phone service providers, the information may be inaccurate. More importantly, if you place a 911 call from your cell phone, the dispatcher may not receive this information about your location.

Recent advances in cell phone technology have been implemented to help pinpoint the location of the cell phone calling 9-1-1; but the technology still has limitations and still may provide inaccurate information regarding your location.

To help ensure that you get the most expedient response from Fire, Emergency Medical, or Law Enforcement please keep the following suggestions in mind when calling 9-1-1.

- Use a hard wire phone if at all possible.
- Be prepared to tell the dispatcher your location (ideally a street address or intersection).
- If you are calling from a cell phone or VOIP the dispatcher will ask you to provide the location you are calling from twice. Once to get your location and a second time to verify the correct location.

For additional information please contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at (303) 755-9202.