

Why do the Public Safety Emergency Telecommunicators (PSETs) ask so many questions when I call 911?

Public Safety Emergency Telecommunications, aka call takers, are required to obtain accurate information in order that public safety first responders make the best decision on how to approach the emergency. Callers will be asked, at a minimum:

- Where
- What
- Who
- When
- (maybe) Weapons

The information you provide a PSET call taker is provided to responding police officers, paramedics and/or firefighters while they are enroute to the call. This helps the public safety first responders make educated decisions on how they respond to the call and what equipment they bring with them. In many cases, public safety units are being dispatched while the call taker is still on the telephone with you.

If I call 911, what will VB9-1-1 ask me?

1. What is the location of the emergency?

This is the address where the emergency is actually happening. The caller is always asked to give the location of the situation as the address data transmitted when the 9-1-1 call is received may not always reflect the exact/correct location. If you don't know the actual address, tell the call taker and then:

- Give cross streets or closest known streets
- Provide landmarks, business names or parks near the emergency.
- Look at the house numbers in the area.
- If you are calling from inside a home or business, look on a piece of mail.
- If you have a GPS, offer dispatchers the GPS coordinates.

When asked for a location, we need you to be specific.

Also, if the suspect just left (such as a theft suspect), the call taker will need to know which way that suspect went and a physical description (clothing, height, weight, gender, race/nationality, etc.).

If you are asked to describe a suspect, start with the most obvious things.

Some examples are:

- "He was a white male."
- "He/she had a gun."
- "He/she was at least 6 feet tall."
- "He/she was wearing a bright red jacket."
- "He had a long brown beard."

If you describe a vehicle, include:

- License plate information, including the state.
- Color.
- Year. (If unknown, describe the vehicle as a new or old vehicle.)
- Make. (Was it a Honda? Nissan? Ford?)
- Body style. (Was it a 4-door? Hatchback? Pick-up truck?)
- Other things you may remember about it. (Did it have a toolbox? Stickers?)

2. What is the phone number you're calling from?

This is the number to the phone you're actually using. VB9-1-1 needs this in case VB9-1-1, or one of the public safety responders, need to call you back.

3. What is the problem?

Tell us exactly what happened. Be as concise as possible. Tell us what the problem is now, not what led up to the problem.

- "I see a fight on the corner of 6th and Pacific."
- "I am fighting with my husband."
- "There is a car accident westbound on Interstate 264 at the Independence Boulevard N exit."

VB9-1-1 will also need to know if you're going to be at, or near, the scene when public safety responders arrive because they may need to talk to you, or you may need to point out the exact location. VB9-1-1 may ask you what kind of car you are in, and/or for you to provide your physical description.

Why does VB9-1-1 ask so many questions on a medical call?

You will be asked a series of questions that will help determine the level of response needed. The public safety responders will be better prepared to help the patient with the information you have provided. VB9-1-1 uses emergency medical dispatch procedures which provide for a consistent method of receiving and processing incoming emergency medical calls for assistance, provide appropriate medical instructions to callers, relay accurate information to public safety responders, and dispatch and coordinate an appropriate response.

- As outlined above, all calls will start with verification of the location where the public safety response is needed. The call will be shipped to the dispatcher while the call taker is still on the telephone with you gathering information, and in many cases, public safety units are being dispatched while the call taker is still on the telephone with you.

If I call to report a fire, what should I tell the dispatcher?

You should be prepared to answer questions like these:

- What is the location/address of the fire?
- What is on fire?
- How large is the fire? (This is only an estimate; think about the size of the fire in relation to something common: the size of a living room, the size of a football field, bigger than a grocery store parking lot.)
- Are any structures threatened? Are there flames moving close to any homes or buildings?
- Are there power lines involved?
- Do you know if anyone is inside the housing or building?
- Do you know if anyone is hurt?

When I call 911, why am I sometimes placed on hold?

When you dial 9-1-1, you may experience a wait time depending on the number of incoming 9-1-1 calls, relative to the number of call takers on duty. It is important you stay on the line until you speak with a call taker and the call taker tells you it is okay to hang up.

At times, 9-1-1 calls into VB9-1-1 spike tremendously. For instance, imagine the number of citizens who may witness an automobile accident at a heavily traveled intersection, 9-1-1 calls to VB9-1-1 can increase, and each 9-1-1 call regarding this type of incident must be processed in the event the caller has information a prior caller could not provide. If you are a passerby to these types of incident (did not witness the incident), attempt to ascertain if others are calling 9-1-1. If you confirm the incident has been reported, and unless you have additional information to add, it is

not necessary for you to call. If you do dial 9-1-1 to report such an incident, and are placed in the queue (on hold), stay on the line, because if you hang up, that generates an additional call for service(call back) that must be processed before the call taker can answer the next 9-1-1 call.

If you dial 9-1-1 by mistake, do not hang up; stay on the line and tell the call taker that you do not have an emergency. If you don't, the call taker may assume that an emergency has occurred and send a public safety response to your location.

When 9-1-1 calls to VB9-1-1 do increase or spike, it is possible for cellular callers to receive a busy signal, dropped call, or "all circuits are busy" message. This can occur due to the traffic on the cellular network. Callers should be aware that when this does occur, the call has not reached VB9-1-1, and call information has not been received that would allow VB9-1-1 to make a call back to you. Pay careful attention if you receive a recorded message, and if the message indicates you have reached VB9-1-1, stay on the line. If you have not reached VB9-1-1 it is important for the caller to continue to redial until they reach VB9-1-1, or if a land line phone is available, attempt to call 9-1-1 from that phone. It is also recommended that the public store the public safety line in their cellular telephone in the event this occurs; however, this number should not be used in case of emergency, unless the caller recognizes their call is not being presented to VB9-1-1. The public safety telephone number is 757-385-5000, option 1.

Additionally, cellular callers need to be aware that when there is traffic on the cellular network, their cellular provider may route their call from 9-1-1 to an administrative number or present a busy signal. When a 9-1-1 call is routed to an administrative line, the address information is not presented to the PSET call taker, and the cellular telephone number also may not present. These activities are not under the control of VB9-1-1.