



COUNTY OF ERIE  
OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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**Barry Grossman**  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**Public Safety Newsletter**  
**September 2010**

*I am very proud to put forth this administration's 3<sup>rd</sup> Public Safety Newsletter. The 911/ Public Safety Center demonstrates just how valuable they are to Erie County with 112,632 calls entered into the CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) system last year. The services they provide are fundamental to the Erie area and to strengthening the community and I thank them for their continued dedication and commitment.*

*Barry Grossman*

*County Executive*

Barry  
Grossman,  
County  
Executive

Jerry Mifsud,  
Director of  
Administration

Todd Geers,  
Director of  
Public Safety

Dale Robinson,  
Emergency  
Management  
Coordinator

John Grappy,  
911 Coordinator

Abdul Osman,  
Chief  
Information  
Officer

**Comments from the Director**

*Hello Erie County!*

*Public safety is a critical component of a healthy, properly functioning community. Public safety involves preparedness, training, proportionate number of first responders, selfless attitudes, reliable communications, and timely response.*

*As the new Director of Public Safety, I bring to Erie County an innate desire to perfect processes and systems, eliminate any waste and redundancies, and train my department for optimal performance. I believe the citizens expect nothing less and I know I expect nothing less from myself.*

*To achieve the aforementioned goals, the Erie County Department of Public Safety adopts guiding Vision and Mission Statements. Coupled with Core Values, we will diligently serve the public, silently earning trust and confidence as our reward for a job well done.*

***Our Vision:*** A safe community for all.

***Our Mission:*** To serve as an omnipresent lifeline for the community.

***Our Values:*** Integrity \* Respect \* Professionalism \* Teamwork

*Public Safety comprises both first responder preparedness and public awareness. In achieving that end, this monthly safety newsletter focuses on public education. I hope you find this information enlightening.*

*Todd R. Geers*

### **Enhanced 9-1-1**



Since May 6, 1993, Erie County residents have been serviced by Enhanced 9-1-1. When the three-digit number is dialed, the call is selectively routed and delivered across dedicated voice/data circuits to a public safety call taker/dispatcher at the primary Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), or 9-1-1 center. Our 9-1-1 center has equipment and database information that allow the call taker to see the caller's phone number,

address, and subscriber information on a display screen.

The Erie County 9-1-1 Emergency Communications Center, located at our new facility at 2880 Flower Road, Erie, PA 16509 in Summit Township, provides emergency 9-1-1 call taking and emergency dispatch services. Erie County 9-1-1 provides Enhanced 9-1-1 services for all wire line, wireless phase I/II, and VoIP services. All incoming

9-1-1 calls are answered, transferred to the appropriate dispatch center, if applicable, or dispatched by Erie County 9-1-1. Erie County 9-1-1 dispatches 32 volunteer fire departments, 2 career fire departments, 6 career EMS providers, and 14 law enforcement agencies.

Upon receipt of an incoming 9-1-1 emergency call, the call taker will ask the caller the following information: "911,

where is your emergency?” Upon determining the accurate location of the emergency call for service, the call taker will ask the “nature of the emergency.” Based on this information, the call taker will determine whether the emergency service provider is served by Erie County 9-1-1 for dispatch services (referred to as non-transfer agencies) or if the caller needs to be transferred to one of seven remote dispatch centers (referred to as transfer agencies).

If the call taker determines the location of the call, the call is served by an emergency service provider, Erie County 9-1-1. The call

taker enters the required, pertinent information into our computer-aided dispatch system and the record is automatically sent to the appropriate dispatch position for the subsequent dispatch of the designated emergency service provider.

However, if the location of the call is served by an emergency service provider not served by Erie County 9-1-1, the call taker will instruct the 9-1-1 caller to “stay on the line” and they will be transferred to the appropriate remote dispatch center for the subsequent dispatch of the designated emergency service provider.

It is important to mention, upon the call being transferred to the remote dispatch center, the 9-1-1 caller will be asked the same initial “key questions” by the (remote dispatch center) dispatcher to determine the location and nature of the emergency. This often causes confusion with the 9-1-1 caller and may result in the delay in the dispatch of the emergency service provider.

In early 2009, in addition to providing emergency 9-1-1 call taking services, Erie County began a multi-phase consolidation plan, providing emergency dispatch services for the following departments:

**City of Corry,  
Police/Fire/EMS**

**Elgin-Beaverdam VFD**

**City of Erie, Bureau of  
Fire**

**City of Erie, Bureau of  
Police**

**Millcreek Fire  
Departments**

**Millcreek Paramedic  
Service**

**Lake City VFD**

**Greenfield VFD**

**Perry Hi-Way VFD**

**Kuhl Hose VFD**

**Waterford VFD**

**Wattsburg VFD**

**Mill Village VFD**

**Union City VFD**

**Edinboro VFD**

**Fairview VFD**

**PA State Police -  
Girard**

**PA State Police - Corry**

**PA State Police - Erie**

*The Erie County transfer agencies, remote dispatch centers are:*

**East Erie County Communications Center**

**West Erie County Communications Center**

**Emergycare, Inc**

**Millcreek Township Police Department**



### **Voice over Internet Protocol**



Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone service is a rapidly growing alternative to traditional phone service. Its popularity is fueled primarily by low prices, new features, and the consumer's ability to choose a phone number from nearly anywhere in the country (and sometimes, other countries). Many industry experts anticipate VoIP's growth will outpace the growth seen by the wireless industry in the last decade.

Traditional phone services have generally associated a particular phone number with a fixed address. Portable

interconnected VoIP service enables consumers to take their home or business phone service almost anywhere. Because certain interconnected VoIP services are portable, or can be used from virtually any Internet connection anywhere, the location of the caller may not be capable of being determined automatically.

When you call 9-1-1 from a traditional telephone (wireline or wireless), the call in most cases is sent to a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) that is responsible for helping people in a particular

geographic area or community. PSAP personnel often can automatically identify your location and direct the closest emergency personnel to that location. They also often can automatically identify your telephone number so that they can call you back if you are disconnected.

Because VoIP service works differently from traditional phone service, consumers who use it should be aware that VoIP 9-1-1 service may also work differently from traditional 9-1-1 service.

VoIP service providers, in response to FCC action, are making progress in eliminating these differences, but some of the possible differences include:

# VoIP

Voice Over Internet Protocol

- ▶ VoIP 9-1-1 calls may not connect to the PSAP, or may improperly ring to the administrative line of the PSAP, which may not be staffed after hours, or by trained 9-1-1 operators
- ▶ VoIP 9-1-1 calls may correctly connect to the PSAP, but not automatically transmit the user's phone number/or local information
- ▶ VoIP customers may need to provide location or other information to their VoIP providers, **and update this information if they change locations**, for their VoIP 9-1-1 service to function properly
- ▶ VoIP service may not work during a power outage, or when the Internet connection fails or becomes overloaded

## Tips for VoIP Subscribers

If you have or are thinking of subscribing to an interconnected VoIP service, you should:

- Provide your accurate physical address to your interconnected VoIP service provider to ensure that emergency services can quickly be dispatched to your location
- Be familiar with your VoIP service provider's procedures for updating your address, and promptly update address information in the event of a change
- Have a clear understanding of any limitations of your 9-1-1 service
- Inform children, babysitters, and visitors about your VoIP service and its 9-1-1 limitations, if any

- If your power is out or your Internet connection is down be aware that your VoIP service may not work. Consider installing a backup power supply, maintaining a traditional phone line, or having a wireless phone as a backup

- If you have questions about whether the phone service you are receiving is an interconnected VoIP service, contact your service provider for further information

## 9-1-1 DOs and DON'Ts



- ▶ 9-1-1 is for police, fire, and medical emergencies

- ▶ If you call 9-1-1, don't hang up
- ▶ Don't call 9-1-1 for jokes or prank calls
- ▶ When you call 9-1-1, pay attention to the questions that you are being asked
- ▶ Stay calm and speak clearly
- ▶ Stay on the line until you are told to hang up
- ▶ For further questions or for additional information, contact your local 9-1-1 Center



### 9-1-1 Tips for Seniors

- Invest in a touch-phone with large, easy-to-read numbers. Some phones can be purchased with a switch that will go from pulse dialing to touch-tone dialing. Make sure the switch is set to touch-tone.

- Call 9-1-1 right away in an emergency
- Dialing "0" will not always connect you with an operator nearby. It may connect you with an operator hundreds of miles away. Always dial 9-1-1 for local, police, fire or medical emergency assistance.
- Call 9-1-1 before calling a family member. Once help is on the way, arrangements can be made to notify your family.
- Stay on the line with the 9-1-1 call taker and answer all questions. The more information they have, the better they are able to help you.
- Try to be patient and stay calm. The call taker and emergency dispatchers may need to ask additional questions while help is on the way.
- The 9-1-1 system allows the call taker to "know" where you are calling from even if you cannot speak. For instance, if you are experiencing a stroke or

if there is an intruder in your home, just dial 9-1-1 and leave the phone off the hook.

### **Do not hang up.**

- It is a good idea to post your address by your telephone. If you have just moved, you may have a new address – but you may recite your old address in an emergency situation. Or you may have visitors who are not familiar with your address. This makes it difficult for the call taker to verify the address that appears on the computer screen.
- Emergency responders cannot help you if they cannot find you. Put your house number – large white numbers against a dark background works best – outside your home so it can be seen from the road day or night.
- Any calls to 9-1-1 are free, even from pay phones or cell phones
- 9-1-1 is a 24-hour-a-day service. You should call immediately when an emergency occurs,

even if it is in the middle of the night.

- Keep your medical history taped to the refrigerator clearly marked with your doctor's phone number(s).

### **Fun Facts**

- ▶ The first national emergency telephone number, 999, was introduced in Great Britain in 1930.

- ▶ In 1968, AT&T announced that it would establish the digits 9-1-1 (nine-one-one) as the emergency code throughout the United States.

- ▶ On February 16, 1968, the first 9-1-1 call was made in the U.S. in Haleyville, Alabama.

- ▶ As of August 1, 2010, the U.S. has 6,149 primary and secondary PSAPs and 99% of the population is covered by a PSAP.

- ▶ An estimated 240 million calls are made to 9-1-1 in the U.S. each year.

- ▶ According to the FCC, one-third of the 240 million calls are wireless calls; in many communities, it is one-half or more of all 9-1-1 calls!

- ▶ In August 2010, Erie County residents made 11,034 9-1-1 calls, of which 65% were from wireless phones.



### **Public Education Outreach Program**

Working in the 9-1-1 Public Education Outreach Program is a serious responsibility, but also a very rewarding experience. Erie County's Outreach Program is coordinated by Mary Richards, who orders the educational materials and schedules the events. Mary is currently involved in an

effort to merge with



other agencies to enhance public awareness on safety issues so that everyone will know what to do in the event of a disaster.

“Mary has the hard job,” said Sheryl Hoetzel, “and I have the pleasure of working with the children of our community so that they are prepared and ‘emergency ready.’”

Sheryl has been participating in public education for the past three years and says it is very gratifying to teach

children about the proper use of dialing

9-1-1. For example, last year while participating at Lowe's Fire Safety Day, a grandmother approached her to thank her for teaching her 5-year-old granddaughter how to call 9-1-1 at a previous public education event. The grandmother explained that she had suffered a stroke and because her granddaughter knew what to do, it saved her life.

Many 9-1-1 calls are made by young children. Whether it is a medical emergency, a fire, or a crime to report, it is essential to teach children when it's okay

### **Multi-Line Telephone Systems**

Public Safety Answering Points rely on accurate, automatic location information to be provided when callers cannot relay their location information. Traditional home (wireline) phones produce the address of a

to call 9-1-1, how to dial 9-1-1, and what to say to the dispatcher. It is equally important to let children know when it is NOT okay to call 9-1-1.

Sheryl uses a simulator phone to teach children how to dial 9-1-1. The child participates in a question-and-answer dialogue with a realistic emergency operator. The simulator is equipped with 7 pre-recorded messages that Sheryl controls via a hand-held remote.

Through the use of the simulator phone, the child is able to practice 9-1-1 skills.

A 3-digit display shows the numbers dialed, and a speaker enables

citizen to the 9-1-1 centers via a database listing the address of the caller (phone number and address are accurately maintained and linked).

Multi-line telephone systems (MLTS), including private branch exchanges (PBX), usually provide 9-1-1

parents to listen to the simulated call – an especially important feature that makes parents aware of their child's ability to give their address in an emergency.

Through proper education, children at an early age can learn to use 9-1-1 correctly, and act quickly and confidently to obtain help in an emergency.



centers with only the phone number and location of the billing address or "front office." Technical solutions, including databases linking internal phone numbers (extensions) to more precise locations such as a suite/apartment number and/or floor level are available, but are not

being used on a widespread basis. Without precise location information, emergency responders can be delayed while trying to find the location of the caller in need.

Many corporations (large and small), hotels, schools, universities and government agencies employ MLTS. These systems are characterized by a central switchboard connected to a number of either on-premise or off-premise extensions.

Connection to an out-dial trunk on systems of this type typically require the dialing of an extra digit (such as nine) to reach an outside phone connection. Increasingly, residential complexes are turning to MLTS for their residents. It has been estimated that perhaps as many as half of the population is living, working or studying behind an MLTS or PBX each day.

The vast majority of these systems do not

provide granular location information with the 9-1-1 call to enable emergency responders to know the actual location of the emergency. In many instances a call from the 12th floor of a large office building may only provide the street address of the building. If the caller is unable to provide his or her location and no one else is available to provide assistance, such a lack of location information can prove fatal.

