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911Lifeline Launches "Ask a Dispatcher"

The On-Line Forum is the Latest Component of 911Lifeline's Public Education Initiative to Improve the Delivery of Emergency Services

Flint, MI—911Lifeline announces the launch of Ask a Dispatcher. The on-line forum offers a unique opportunity for the public to get an inside look at the 9-1-1 system, and to "meet" the people who are the first to respond to every emergency.

The purpose of the forum is to raise the public's understanding of how 9-1-1 works, how to use the system most effectively, and to clarify misconceptions.

The forum also offers the opportunity to discuss 9-1-1 related news articles and other mass media reports, as well as personal experiences.

911Lifeline's professional members will answer questions, and participate in discussions.

Michael Wallach, 911Lifeline's president, remarks that, "While almost everyone knows what 9-1-1 is, and what it is for, most people have little understanding about how it works. Misconceptions are very common. This often results in unjustified criticism, and contributes to the misuse of the system, which degrades its performance."

Vice president Jim Jones adds that, "9-1-1 is a two way street. As much as the public needs to understand the proper use of the system, the 9-1-1 professional needs to understand how the public perceives them, and the way they do their work. Ask a Dispatcher promotes a dialog that will benefit both sides of the 9-1-1 call."

Ask a Dispatcher is a unique opportunity to learn about the many roles of the public safety telecommunicator, and the challenges they face. But more importantly, it connects the public to the highly trained and dedicated individuals who stand ready to respond to every crisis, emergency, and call for help.

The forum is available from the 911Lifeline web site under "Discussions." A free registration is required to post questions and comments.

A Brief History of 9-1-1

The first dedicated emergency phone number, 999, began service in Great Britain on July 8, 1937. The first-ever call was placed by Mrs. John Stanley Beard of London, who reported a burglar trying to break into her home.

The introduction of nation-wide emergency numbers was slow, but by the end of the 1950's, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand all had dedicated emergency numbers. It would be another decade for the United States to catch up.

In February 1967, President Lyndon Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice recommended establishing a nation-wide telephone number for police services.

On January 12, 1968, AT&T announced that 911 would be the dedicated emergency number, and they were going to implement it throughout the Bell Telephone Network. However, nobody anticipated Bob Gallagher, the president of the independent Alabama Telephone Company.

Bob had read the AT&T announcement in the Wall Street Journal. He realized he could scoop them, and implement 9-1-1 service first.

Just 35 days later, at 2PM on Friday, February 16, 1968, Alabama Speaker of the House Rankin Fite made the first 9-1-1 call in the United States from the Haleyville Alabama City Hall to the red phone installed at the Haleyville police station. U.S. Representative Tom Bevill answered the call, and immortalized the auspicious moment in a single word—"Hello?"

Today, 99% of the United States has 9-1-1 service. The nearly 7,000 Public Safety Answering Points handle hundreds of thousands of calls every day. The 9-1-1 center in New York City alone answers more than 35,000 calls daily; some 14 million a year.

For a detailed and definitive history of 9-1-1, we recommend the article published by 911 Magazine On-line (<http://www.911dispatch.com/911/history/index.html>).

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About 911Lifeline

911Lifeline was founded in April 2006 as a national not-for-profit organization offering services, and resources to the 9-1-1 telecommunicator, the media, and the public. It was incorporated in Michigan in February, 2009. The mission of 911Lifeline is to provide on-the-job support to its professional members, and to foster a better public understanding of the 9-1-1 system. For more information visit 911lifeline.org, or email info@911lifeline.org. Requests from the media for assistance with 9-1-1 related projects can be submitted from the web site. *9-1-1: The lifeline for the public, and those who serve and protect them.*TM