

911 Backups Prompt Police To Use 211 Tool

Last Update: 6/06 11:05 pm

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Cincinnati Police say 911 abuse is jamming phone lines, and potentially delaying police and firefighters to real emergencies. They're now urging those with less pressing matters to consider dialing 211, instead.

So many non-emergency calls are coming in that people with real emergencies are being put on hold. Dispatchers say while someone could be in serious danger, they're answering calls from people who want information about things police can't do anything about.

If you ever have to dial 911, you would expect someone to respond to your emergency immediately.

"If my house is burning down or I'm being robbed or something terrible has happened is usually what you call 911 for," said Andrew Cawthorn, lives in Cincinnati.

Most people get it, but many don't.

Even with every operator working, three 911 callers on hold are getting a recording, "please stay on the line. Your call will be answered as soon as possible."

It's because people are jamming the phone lines, calling to find out where to park for Reds games, and complaining about their neighbor's religion.

Police say these are total abuses of the 911 system, but dispatchers also get calls for services that police can't provide.

"Like substance abuse problems," said Lt. Col. Cindy Combs, Cincinnati Police. "They may have a loved one that has some mental health issues and the person isn't acting out currently, but they basically want to know who might be able to help them."

That's why officers and dispatchers were watching a training DVD Friday. It explains how to use 211, the United Way's 24-7 problem-solving number that directs callers to services, everything from childcare to substance abuse.

"If you have a burning house call 911, but if you have a burning question dial 211," said Amy Roberts, United Way.

Although 211 has been around for five years, a lot of people have never heard of it. United Way is putting up billboards to get the word out hoping more people will use 211.

"Just like everybody knows how to call LaRosa's, 347-1111," said Terri Baston, never heard of 211. "It would be the same way I guess, just advertising. We all know the LaRosa's number. But we don't know 211."

United Way and police say getting the word out is really the key.

When they go on runs, Cincinnati officers will be handing out cards explaining the 211 tool. The cards are printed in English and Spanish.

Source: Local12.com News Website