

Accidental 911 Calls from Wireless Phones Pose Risk to Public Safety

Unintentional 911 calls placed from wireless phones clog the phone lines that deliver 911 calls to Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), which handle 911 calls, and put the PSAPs' ability to respond to real emergencies at risk. Here's how the problem occurs, and what you can do to avoid making an accidental 911 call.

Many older wireless phones are equipped with a feature designed to dial 911 automatically in an emergency. For example, when one key – typically the “9” – is held down for a few seconds, the phone automatically dials 911. The person using the phone may not even be aware of the feature or that it has been pre-activated by the manufacturer or retailer. Accidental dialing of 911 can occur even more frequently with open-face design phones that may bump against other objects in a purse, briefcase, or pocket. Newer wireless phones generally either do not have the capability to automatically dial 911, or require the user to activate the feature to make it work.

Accidental 911 calls cause problems for the public safety community, which must spend time and resources to determine whether a 911 call is real or accidental. A 911 operator must stay on the line to make this determination. If no one is on the line, the operator may need to disconnect the call and call the user back to determine whether the call is real or accidental. If no one answers, the operator may spend even more time trying to reach the caller, or even dispatch emergency services to help the caller. These efforts waste resources and divert scarce public safety personnel from other 911 calls reporting real emergencies.

Avoiding Accidental 911 Calls

You can help reduce accidental 911 calls by:

- Locking keypads using the keypad lock feature. Keypad locks, some of which can be programmed to activate automatically, prevent a phone from responding to keystrokes until you unlock the keypad using a short combination of key presses.
- Turning off the 911 auto-dial feature, if your phone has one. To determine whether your phone has this feature and how to turn it off, check your user manual or the manufacturer's website, or call your service provider.

Consumer Help Center

For more information on consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

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