

Allegan County 9-1-1, Where is Your Emergency? By Jan Goswick, Central Dispatch Director

Have you ever had to call 9-1-1? Hopefully not, but it is important that if you do that you understand what the dispatchers are doing and why they are asking so many questions on the other end of the line.

Allegan County 9-1-1 is a centralized dispatch center that answers all emergency calls and non-emergency calls within Allegan County. We also dispatch assistance for all public safety and emergency services in Allegan County. This includes 9 law enforcement agencies, 5 EMS agencies, and 24 fire departments. Further, we work very closely with the Department of Natural Resources, Road Commission, AERO Med, West Michigan Air Care, Hospitals, Michigan Department of Transportation, utility companies, and many other agencies that may be involved in emergency situations.

When you dial 9-1-1 you should always assume the dispatcher does not know where you are calling from. The most important information we can get in an emergency is the location that the incident is occurring. If we don't get any other information than the location, at least we can get help on the way to assess the situation. Allegan 9-1-1 will ask for your nearest cross streets to assist in verifying your location. A cross street is the two closest streets that cross near your address or the location you are calling from. Mile markers also help us verify locations of callers on the highway.

In an emergency situation, callers tend to get frustrated answering questions because they do not always realize we already have help on the way. However, after a dispatcher has your location, even though they will start asking more questions, they are also typing information into the Computer Aided Dispatch System (CAD). The CAD allows the call taker to stay on the phone with you, and at the same time, a team member/fellow dispatcher can dispatch the proper agencies to your call. The more information dispatchers obtain the more information we can relay to the proper emergency responders. This not only allows the dispatcher to keep the scene as safe as possible for first responders, but by staying on the line we may also be able to provide pre-arrival instructions to the caller until help has arrived.

It is estimated that with today's technology, over 85 percent of the nation has a cellular phone. This has proven to be a great benefit in emergency situations. However, it is important to realize that when you call 9-1-1, several other people may be calling in the same emergency at the same time. When this happens the dispatcher will get the key information from you, but may not stay on the line.