

Know What to Expect When Calling 9-1-1

Local News

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(Olympia) — The week of April 10 — 16, 2011 is National Telecommunicators Week, and Communications Officers of the Washington State Patrol want you to know what to expect when you call 9-1-1 with an emergency.

Callers are frequently confused or even irritated that dispatchers ask so many questions.

“We teach our dispatchers to take control of the conversation, because witnesses to a crime or collision are frequently rattled and upset,” said Mark Layhew, director of WSP’s Communications Division. “The dispatcher’s goal is to get the conversation focused so that the right kind of help can be sent.”

Modern computer technology allows Communications Officers to get that help rolling while getting additional information from callers. Troopers, firefighters and paramedics can all be dispatched by other operators, while the call-taker enters information into a computer screen.

Part of sending the right help also means not wasting resources by sending unnecessary responders. Layhew cited a common problem with callers who report collisions.

“It’s worth taking time to ask a caller if someone is injured,” Layhew said. “If we send paramedics to a non-injury collision, those paramedics are unavailable should someone else in the community have a heart attack.”

If a crime is involved, dispatchers will also want a description of the fleeing person or vehicle and a direction of travel. Dispatchers will also ask for your name, and call back number. That’s in case troopers have trouble finding the exact location.

Bottom line: answering the dispatcher’s questions gives them the best opportunity to help you.

The Washington State Patrol is hiring Communications Officers. More information on WSP’s Communications Division can be found at: <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/employment/communications.htm>

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9-1-1 DISPATCHERS, America’s First Responders.