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PILOT PROJECT OF "911"
THE UNIVERSAL EMERGENCY NUMBER
IN THE LOS ANGELES METROPOLITAN AREA

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Prepared by the Los Angeles County
Chief Administrative Office

"911" is a service to the citizen. It is a direct link via any telephone to emergency service at any time of crisis. "911" makes it unnecessary for the citizen to have all of the emergency numbers (approximately 100 in Los Angeles County) committed to memory or to depend upon a telephone operator who may or may not be efficient and adequately trained in handling emergencies.

The three-digit emergency number is easy to remember, especially when compared with the myriad of emergency numbers in this metropolitan area; it is easily dialed in the dark; there is less chance of misdialing in a panic; it is easily taught to children; and most importantly it connects the caller directly to an emergency agency.

Dialing "O" for operator does some of these, but it is lacking in several areas: (1) An emergency call to the operator is recognized only as an "O" call. There is no way it can be given priority and must wait its turn to be answered during peak traffic periods. (2) Operator turnover is creating an increasing problem--young girls with little telephone experience are now in the majority and it is these young and inexperienced girls who are attempting to handle emergency calls. (3) Operators are unfamiliar with the area they serve. Callers who do not know which jurisdiction they are in, are routed to the primary emergency agency which must then determine the proper jurisdiction and handle the call, relay it, or direct the person to call another number. (4) If someone blurts out information on a fire or other emergency and hangs up, the operator has no way to review the call. An emergency agency, however, can play back a tape of the call and analyze what was said. (5) Emergency agencies using "911" could patch nearly all emergency calls through immediately over dedicated trunks and it is immediately recognized as an emergency by the proper jurisdiction. The operator does not have this capability and must look up the seven-digit number and then dial it. (6) Telephone operators usually receive just one day of training and less than one hour on handling emergencies. A telephone operator with this limited training cannot be expected to perform as well as an emergency operator, who has had months of training and close supervision before she is considered competent enough to handle emergency calls.

Most importantly, "911" should provide an effective emergency number usable any time, any place. It will decrease dialing time, cut out intermediaries, and insure that trained emergency personnel answer emergency calls. Emergency personnel are trained to calm people, to get all needed information, to keep the caller on the line, and they are also trained and able to give advice on what should be done until help arrives.

"911" has been inplemented in about 60 communities across the
United States, with 43 communities scheduled to implement it in
1970. In California, only one community has implemented "911";
that is Gustine, a small city near Fresno. Seattle, the largest
city committed to implement "911" on the West Coast, is scheduled
for implementation in late 1970 or early 1971.

The areas now using "911" as an emergency number are satisfied
that it is an excellent service to the public. In these juris-
dictions a pattern has developed of maintaining localized
dispatching within the existing jurisdictions. Cooperation has
of necessity increased in these areas, but this kind of cooperation
already exists in the Los Angeles area where the preservation of
life and property have long been recognized as more important than
jurisdictional boundaries.

In the case of fire protection it is interesting to note that no
area implementing "911" has had an increase in the fire ratings
attributable to "911" or any of its related systems.

To study "911" and its possible use for the Los Angeles metropolitan
area an informal working committee was formed, composed of
representatives of the County Communications Department, Sheriff's
Department, Forester and Fire Warden, and Department of Hospitals;
the City of Los Angeles' Department of Public Utilities and
Transportation, Fire Department and Police Department; and the
California Highway Patrol, the U.S. Forestry Service, the League
of California Cities--Los Angeles Division, Pacific Telephone
Company, and the General Telephone Company.

The committee found that there are several basic problems in
implementing "911" in this metropolitan area. Los Angeles
County has a multitude of city police and fire service, the
County Sheriff and County Fire Department; many public and private
ambulance service agencies, and several State emergency service
agencies such as the California Highway Patrol. Most of these
have their own existing communication, and dispatching systems.
The problems directly related to these jurisdictional and boundary
differences are:

(1) The technical problems caused by "911" being limited by
     equipment design to the fixed boundaries of telephone
     area exchanges which do not coincide with local government
     jurisdictional boundaries;

(2) The functional problem of coordinating the separate dis-
     patching services of fire, police, and ambulance within
     each central office service area; and

(3) The operational problem of where to terminate "911" lines and how to route and transfer calls from the receiving point to the proper dispatching service.

It was the conclusion of this committee that these three problems would not permit installation of a "911" system over the entire County at one time. It was instead proposed that a trial project, subject to the following criteria, be developed by the agencies involved:

1. The police, fire, and ambulance services should be the only emergency services included in the "911" system. These are the same three services as proposed by A.T.& T. Such emergency services as those for utilities, public health, road, and flood control should continue to use their existing systems.

2. Dispatching operations should not be combined for all police, fire, and ambulance services because of differences in existing dispatching methods.

3. Existing emergency service agencies should handle all "911" calls. To do otherwise would divide responsibility and place an intermediary between distressed persons and the local emergency dispatching services.

4. The "911" answering points should be located on a decentralized basis to avoid telephone traffic tie-ups during peak emergency periods.

5. The Telephone Company should continue providing existing "Dial 0 for emergency" procedures as a backup for "911".

A test of "911" is considered necessary because there is no data available on the effect the emergency number would have on the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. The communities that have implemented "911" are operating under different conditions than we have here so we cannot realistically use the data they have accumulated. For this reason a trial was proposed to test the feasibility of "911" under Los Angeles conditions. This trial would provide data on "911" usage, emergency agency cooperation, equipment needs, personnel costs, and identify hidden problems that can be readily handled in a small area and planned for in any expanded use of "911".

In the trial that was proposed (the Lomita Service Area) the Los Angeles County Sheriff's station at Lennox would answer the "911" calls and patch Los Angeles City's calls through to the City Police and Fire Departments. Los Angeles City would receive only

their own calls that were patched through and would not have to relay calls to any other jurisdiction.

The test would be conducted in two phases:

--"911" would be available for use by emergency agencies but it would not be announced to the public. Emergency agency personnel would test the system to determine if there are any inadequacies and if any were found, they would be corrected. The emergency agencies would have approximately one month to test the system and if it was operating satisfactorily, Phase II would begin.

--After the agencies were satisfied that the system was working and adjacent areas were protected with a recording, it would be announced that "911" was available for public use.

Public participation would last from three to six months according to the success of the system, the volume of calls received, and the time required to complete an evaluation of the system. The test should last long enough to establish a calling pattern that would reflect every day "911" usage and not just the initial curiosity stage. If after the test use of "911" was discontinued, the public would be notified that "911" was no longer available, but the system would remain operational until emergency calls ceased coming in on the "911" trunks.

The cost for this test to the City of Los Angeles would be approximately $125 for installation and $200 monthly for the duration of the test.

It should be stressed that "911" is being considered as an additional service to the public and not in lieu of any we now have. All services now available will remain available--seven-digit emergency numbers, call boxes, dialing "0", and all others. This would also be true if "911" was implemented; no service would be withdrawn or downgraded.

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