



## Cellular Phones and the Use of 9-1-1

Cellular telephones have been around for three decades and have proven to be a mostly reliable communications link to the outside world. Most of the time, when one utilizes a cellular phone to call a friend (business, client, etc), the call goes through without any issue at all. At times, low signal strength or periods of heavy cellular phone usage prevent calls from going through. Most cellular phone users have become accustomed to the occasional time when they are unable to complete a call on demand. Many times, one either redials immediately or will wait a short period of time for reception to improve. At most, a slight inconvenience for the caller.

### **Although unacceptable, calls to 9-1-1 are subject to the above limitations – and more!**

Cellular phones work using radio waves and due to their nature are less reliable than traditional landline service. When using a landline telephone, the telephone system “knows” where you are if not simply because there is a wire directly connecting your phone to the telephone company’s network. Cellular phone companies can sometimes provide an approximate location of your handset based on a couple of different types of technology. This is where problems can arise when attempting to dial 9-1-1 on your cellular phone.

Calls to 9-1-1 do not get ‘priority treatment’ during times of heavy phone usage. If all available cellular phone channels are in use and you need to call 9-1-1, your call will not go through until someone else terminates their phone call (and your call is ‘next in line’ for service).

There are several things that can happen when dialing 9-1-1 from your cellular phone:

1. The call is received by the proper PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point). Information provided includes the name of the wireless company who is sending the call to 9-1-1 (such as US Cellular, Sprint, etc) and the location (and which side of) the antenna that is handling your call. We also receive the phone number of the handset that is making the call to 9-1-1 and we receive a GPS location, which can be accurate from 9 meters to about a mile or more from where the telephone is actually located.
2. The call is received by the proper PSAP. Information provided includes all information listed in scenario #1 except for the GPS location.
3. The call is received by the proper PSAP, but no further information is received with the phone call (no GPS, antenna location, cell phone carrier, phone number, etc).
4. The call is routed to the wrong PSAP, which would cause delays in getting your emergency call routed to the proper location.
5. The call is unable to be completed (for a variety of reasons).

It is important to remember that cellular 9-1-1 is not as reliable as traditional home phone service. One cannot assume we know who you are and where you are calling from when dialing 9-1-1 with your mobile device. Even in the most perfect conditions (see scenario #1), the 9-1-1 system does not receive altitude information. So, we may be able to pinpoint your location to somewhere inside of a 9-story building, but would be unable to tell you which floor (or room) you are located.

**DO NOT** rely on your cell phone to provide us with the valuable information we need to send help! Always remain on the line with the call taker and follow their instructions. If the call is disconnected, call 9-1-1 back immediately. Cellular telephones are wonderful pieces of technology, but they are not without their faults. Always assume when you call 9-1-1 that the call taker has no idea where you are located. When calling, help us to help you!