

Commentary on Public Education and Your Community

By Debi McGrath, Public Education and Training
Manager, Seaway 9-1-1 Communications

The lack of community education on 9-1-1 technology and issues has led to a life-saving system overloaded with misuse and abuse.

FROM THE TIME YOU WERE KNEE-HIGH TO A GRASSHOPPER YOU probably heard the following buzz phrases:

“Go to school.”

“Stay in school.”

“Get a good education.”

“Don’t skip school.”

“Graduate from high school.”

“Where are you going to attend college or university?”

So what is all this education about? Is it about lessons in life and a future to make our mark in society? Maybe so, but whatever we do, we know that the result of the final outcome is relative to the amount of information we take in and apply when performing a task. Whether it is a volunteer position or a high-paying job, education is vital to perform our responsibilities correctly.

In order to keep a job or, better still, earn a raise, our performance is measured by how well we follow and apply the rules, listen to the supervisor, show up for work and act responsibly.

How do we make a pie without a recipe? We don’t. It takes education—whether formal or informal—to achieve the skills necessary to do well in a job.

So why are we faced with a life-saving system (9-1-1) that appears to be overloaded with misuse, abuse and prank calls? Could it possibly be the lack of education?

- When was the last time you informed the public about 9-1-1 and its purpose?
- When was the last time you told the public what you need to know when you answer 9-1-1 calls?

- How many times does a caller just rattle on and not listen to the 9-1-1 call taker’s questions?
- How many times has someone misdialed and hung up?
- How many times has a wireless caller not known his or her call back number?
- Do callers in your area know the difference between land-line 9-1-1 calls and wireless 9-1-1 calls?
- “Where are you, sir?”... “I don’t know. You should know where I am.” Sound familiar?
- What does a silent call mean to you?
- Domestic violence or abuse victims ... can they call and not have to talk?
- Have you ever been on a bad date and needed help?
- Are there hearing-impaired people in your community or driving through?
- And people using preprogrammed buttons on their cell phones that dials 9-1-1 when they sit on it?

Whether it is a volunteer position or a high-paying job, education is vital to perform our responsibilities correctly.

The list of questions goes on and on. The answer to all of them is education.

Now lets look again at education and what it does for you. If we educate the public about the proper use of 9-1-1, when to call it, and what it is for, would that help? Would education on technology of the 9-1-1 system help change the perception of the average 9-1-1 caller? Yes.

Education can work; this has been proven. We just have to take the time to do it in the 9-1-1 industry. 9-1-1 education is an ongoing task. You can start with school-age children and, eventually, they will be tomorrow’s adults who are educated on 9-1-1 usage. Invest in your PSAP’s future. Think about it ... think education.

NENA offers a full-day course called “In the Trenches Approach to 9-1-1 Public Education.” Whether you have a big budget or none at all, this course will show you how to set up

an education program that can make a real difference. Information on target audiences, what to teach and a list of training materials are provided in this course. Come share your ideas and take home new ideas that have been successful in other areas. Remember that education is key.

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Partnerships in Public Education

By Bettie Wesson-Grimes, 9-1-1 Education Representative, City of Plano, Texas

Forming a partnership can give your 9-1-1 project merit and reduce your budget without reducing your message.

WITHIN THE PUBLIC EDUCATION COMMUNITY, IT IS RARE THAT 9-1-1 educators are able to fully instruct their citizens without help from an outside source. Whether your target audience is one elementary school or your entire adult community, forming a partnership with others can give your project merit and reduce your budget without reducing your message. Because wireless education is at the forefront of most education curriculums these days, let's walk through a scenario in which an agency could partner with other resources to propose a wireless education program for its community.

After identifying the education message, network with other 9-1-1 educators to see if any of them already have a similar program that has been developed and implemented. They may be able to give you insight as to where to cut your budget, ideas that look good on paper but don't work out in the real world, or what will give you the most bang for your buck. More importantly, they may be willing to partner with you and share their facts and figures, handout materials, outside resource contact names and numbers and vendor information. If you're really fortunate, they'll give you their project curriculum that you can tweak to make it work for your area. Should you find yourself in the unfortunate situation of having no one nearby to contact, start searching the Internet for 9-1-1 Public Education and you will have many agency websites to look through. Most of the sites will have the contact name and number of their local 9-1-1 public educator and links to even more sites.

After your wireless phone education program is outlined, it's time to think about ways to your reinforce your message after the initial presentation. Most educators utilize informational take-home materials such as brochures, stickers and small giveaways such as key chains, pencils, rulers or erasers. This is another partnering opportunity—by purchasing items in larger quantities, the overall price of the item is reduced. If you find that you have no one else who can partner with you locally, go to the NENA website (www.NENA9-1-1.org) and visit the Public Education Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse is a database of 9-1-1 educators who have purchased giveaway items in the past and have vendor contact names and phone numbers they can share with you. Frequently, these 9-1-1 educators purchase large quantities of public education supplies. If they have an upcoming order they plan to purchase, you may be able to partner with them to place an overall larger order and thus reduce costs for both of you. If not, feel free to contact the agencies' vendor to inquire if the vendor has another customer that recently has requested information for or ordered the item that you want. Usually, the vendors will contact their other cus-

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tomers to see if they would be willing to partner with you.

If you find your budget won't allow you to purchase the amount of printing or giveaway items you require, contact local wireless-related businesses to see if you can partner with them to help fund your project. They may be willing to give you a one-time donation to help with the budget, but more likely would be willing to donate their products, time or supplies. For

example, they may not be able to give you \$2,500 to purchase key chains, but they could print your brochures and donate ten thousand cell phone stickers to your project. In turn, they may ask that you add their logo to the back of your brochure or add a small line at the bottom such as “Informational Brochure printed by ‘X’ Wireless Company.” The funds you had budgeted for printing can now be spent on keychains.

Once you have your message and your reinforcement materials, it’s time to distribute your message. Partnering with area businesses may be the way to accomplish this. In the past, local agencies have partnered with area fast food businesses by imprinting tray liners with their safety message and adding outlined graphics that children can color. Within the next few months, our agency is partnering with other area agencies to promote 9-1-1 Awareness Week. Additionally, agencies partner with local grocery stores that print a 9-1-1 message on their grocery bags. This exposure is tremendous, and it all started with a phone call asking for their help.

Partnerships between 9-1-1 agencies and other resources can help your education programs move onward and upward. Challenge yourself to look for opportunities to partner with other agencies and businesses—you are only limited by your imagination and creativity.

Bettie Wesson-Grimes has worked for the City of Plano, TX, since 1989. Starting her career as a 9-1-1 operator, she quickly became a police dispatcher, fire dispatcher and EMT before becoming a shift supervisor. For the last seven years she has worked as a 9-1-1 education representative; she and her partner are in charge of all 9-1-1 education for the City of Plano as well as motivating Plano’s 9-1-1 personnel.

Four Steps to Public Education

1. After identifying the education message, network with other 9-1-1 educators.
2. Think about ways to your reinforce your message after the initial presentation—informational take-home materials.
3. If your budget won’t allow printing or giveaway items, contact local wireless-related businesses to see if you can partner with them.
4. Once you have your message and your reinforcement materials, distribute your message.

The Public Perception Problem with 9-1-1

By Christy Williams, ENP, 9-1-1 Program Manager,
North Central Texas Council of Governments

Technology is changing,
9-1-1 is changing and now it
is time for 9-1-1 public education
to make a change as well.

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, I HAD THE EXCITING OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN educating the public on 9-1-1. It was easy then—the service was new, people were curious and the media found the topic newsworthy. Our 9-1-1 agency was invited to speak at numerous functions and events, participate in safety fairs and invited into the schools. 9-1-1 public education was in great demand.

As the years went by and 9-1-1 became more common, I received fewer requests and had to begin making contact with groups and organizations and asking if I could come speak about 9-1-1. Even within the 9-1-1 industry, the value of public education was questioned. “We’ve had the service for a

while and everyone knows how to dial 9-1-1, so why should we continue to educate the public?" became a common question.

As a public educator, I firmly believe that education is a continual process, not a short-term project. There always are new children to educate and there is more to the 9-1-1 message than merely "We have it." You must teach the public when to call 9-1-1, how to call 9-1-1 and what to say when one calls 9-1-1.

Inappropriate 9-1-1 calls flood call centers all over the country, new phones create challenges for callers to even dial a simple number like 9-1-1, and it's important that a caller knows what he or she needs to communicate to the 9-1-1 call-taker. So, you can imagine the soapbox that had to be climbed to continue public education efforts.

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9-1-1 Education Transformation

However, technology is changing, 9-1-1 is changing and now it is time for 9-1-1 public education to make a change as well. 9-1-1 is no longer a simple message. With wireless phones and the complexity of Phase I and Phase II, the public has a real perception problem with 9-1-1 and its expectations are often unrealistic ... and people could die.

9-1-1 public education must transform to keep up with technology. Our industry has worked diligently throughout the years to ensure technology did not leave 9-1-1 behind; however, we have not done well in explaining our efforts and advancements to the public. Public education must now take a very sophisticated message and make it understandable to the

general public. This means no technical jargon and no acronyms. We must explain in common terms what wireless technology in 9-1-1 means to the average Joe.

In my geographical area, there are 9-1-1 agencies with Wireless Phase 0, Phase I and Phase II. Unfortunately, we all share the same media. So, the wonderful stories being published and aired regarding great life-saving incidents in 9-1-1 call centers with Phase II are leaving our public with the perception that they all have that level of service. This is dangerous and must be addressed with the media and the public. This is just one example that illustrates how 9-1-1 public educators have their jobs cut out for them. This is an important aspect of 9-1-1 and public education that is currently being recognized by the industry as such.

At this year's annual NENA Conference in Denver, several technical sessions spurred questions regarding public education and several public education projects are now in progress within NENA. It is time to shift gears and tackle wireless 9-1-1 public education as well as education on other important technical issues so the public understands what level of 9-1-1 service is available to each of them.

General public education remains important, but technical 9-1-1 public education is vital. All of the technology available will be useless if the public doesn't understand what to expect and how to use 9-1-1 in today's environment.

Christy Williams, ENP, is the 9-1-1 program manager for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, serving forty-two PSAPs in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex area. She is the current Chair of the NENA Public Education Committee and a member of the NENA Education Advisory Board. She can be reached via e-mail at cwilliams@nctcog.org.

Refer to http://www.nena9-1-1.org/9-1-1OperPractices/PubEd/public_ed.htm for more information on the work being done by the NENA Public Education Committee. We are currently accepting new members to this committee.

Education Tip: One County's Method For Wireless Phase II Public Education

By Patty Cross, Manager, ENP, Public Educator/Trainer, Denco Area 9-1-1 District, Texas

Understanding the ins and outs of Wireless Phase II technology complicates the basic issues of public 9-1-1 education: (1) getting the public to correctly use the emergency response system, (2) helping them understand when to call and (3) teaching them what information to give.

YOU WORKED HARD, THE CONTRACTS ARE PREPARED, SIGNED AND sealed and the network has been built, tested, and is now working. New software, including mapping, is installed, tweaked, and the telecommunicators have been trained. Wireless Phase II is ready to roll out in your area. Much of the work is done behind the scenes because you don't want to promise what you can't deliver to the public. The process is so multifaceted that even when you discuss your progress with family and friends, their eyes glaze over. So, with only each other to congratulate, your agency turns up Phase II wireless service.

But after a brief time, your pride in what you've accomplished spills over and you realize, it's not bragging, it's fact, and the public needs to know how wireless calls are handled in your area. In Texas, a growing number of emergency communication districts have completed or are near completion of Phase II with all their carriers. There's some friendly competition for the right to claim whose system was completed first. Since John Melcher, "preacher/speaker extraordinaire" and immediate past president of NENA, works for Greater Harris Co. Emergency 9-1-1 Network, and makes that claim, it's doubtful anyone will believe it was Denco. We're all just happy to be in such good company. In fact, the communications districts have worked together to tackle many implementation problems.

A New Twist on the Old 9-1-1 Public Education Story

Denco Area 9-1-1 District is the coordinating body for 9-1-1 service in Denton County and the City of Carrollton. It provides equipment, network, database, public education and training for eleven PSAPs across the county. Located just fifteen miles north of Dallas and Fort Worth, the county is part of what is referred to as the Metroplex and has a fast growing population of nearly five hundred thousand residents.

The public education and training manager of Denco develops and distributes information on the correct use of 9-1-1 by the public. Press releases and news stories featuring examples of the new technology in use by telecommunicators from the agencies we support is one way to educate.

Kellie Jarrett of the Lewisville Police Department used the map to locate a Spanish-speaking construction worker whose coworker had been injured on the job. Carolyn Farmer of Denton Police Department used the map and a game of hot and cold with responders' sirens to find a young man who had been thrown into the middle of an overgrown field from a car that had spun off the road, hit a telephone pole and sailed through a tree. These and other less dramatic success stories began to pour in after Phase II technology was implemented. Our



telecommunicators understood the advantages of the technology and were using it skillfully.

9-1-1 wireless public education is a new twist on an old story. Getting the public to correctly use the emergency response system, understand when to call, and what information to give are important, but understanding the ins and outs of Wireless Phase II technology complicates these basic issues.

The Education Plan

We started by informing the public that Denton County is ready for wireless calls. From the statistics, you would think that every person knows that they can use a wireless phone to call 9-1-1, yet this basic question is the most commonly asked at community events. We also wanted to give some standard safety tips and, lastly, to provide information about accessing location service depending on the type of phone the caller is using.

To meet these needs, we created a postcard with one side providing standard safety tips. The language for the tips is paraphrased from an educational brochure designed by Amanda Mayer of the South Plains Association of Governments. In our state we do a lot of sharing of public education ideas through a wonderful group known as the 9-1-1 Public Educators of Texas, which meets quarterly.

The other side of the postcard is deceptively simple. The initial design of the postcard included the phrases “Wireless Phase II” and “GPS technology.” It came off sounding confusing, and worse, vaguely self-important. During the many re-edits, Denco’s executive director, Mike Pedigo, made a suggestion, “Let’s consider whether or not my ninety-five-year-old grandmother would understand this. If we can write about this technology with her in mind, we’ll have a winner.”

We had several things to consider. Here in Denton County, there are six wireless providers: AT&T Wireless, Cingular, Nextel, Sprint PCS, T-Mobile, and Verizon Wireless. Two of these companies use a network solution to route 9-1-1 calls; the others use a handset solution. The handset solutions use a variety of technologies, including A-GPS and EOTD to determine the location of the caller. The result was a simplified message, but with some key points. Bolded red text was used to emphasize these important points.

For example, the phrase “in Denton County” is written in red because we are surrounded by areas that are still working on location technology, and we don’t want anyone to assume they have Phase II when in fact, it has not yet been deployed. Also, note the words, “approximate location.” We never use the words “pinpoint” or “exact location,” terms inappropriately used by the media. Location technologies give the telecommunicator a good idea of where the caller is, but we don’t want to give anyone the impression that it locates them exactly.

We then sorted network-based providers from handset-based ones and let the consumer know that their approximate location will be displayed on our 9-1-1 equipment when using (in red again) “AT&T or Cingular service, or specially equipped phones from Nextel, Sprint PCS, T-Mobile and Verizon Wireless.” The phrase “specially equipped phones” was a



deliberate substitute for naming the various location technologies used by wireless providers. Back to Mike’s grandmother—if she did not understand this phrase, she would know to ask at the retail outlet for “one of those special phones that work with 9-1-1.” We’ll leave the explanation of A-GPS or EOTD to the customer service reps at the stores. They are better able to explain their unique technologies.

We had the postcard printed at a local shop on slick cardstock and discussed ideas for distribution. The most logical plan would be for our 9-1-1 district to partner with the wireless service providers, asking them to hand out the cards provided by our district. Working with either the local or national public relations departments provided Denco with some excellent outlets. In some cases, it took more than a few calls and e-mails to get our request to the right person. Overall, we had a great deal of open conversation and cooperation with our request to distribute the cards when new cell phones were purchased. Verizon Wireless was first to say, “Yes,” with Sprint PCS and T-Mobile agreeing soon after the postcard was reviewed by their legal departments. AT&T Wireless used the card design to invigorate its own wireless safety campaign, which will be launched nationally. Cards now have been shipped to each participating service provider for distribution at all their regional outlets.

At Denco, we are hopeful that the distribution of this card, combined with other planned educational components, will result in an improved use of 9-1-1 from wireless devices. It wasn’t long ago that we were trying to get the message out about the availability and proper use of wireline 9-1-1! Wireless technology presents a new challenge for public education. We can only imagine what our next one will be.

Patty Cross, Manager, ENP, is a Public Educator/Trainer, Denco Area 9-1-1 District. She has been with the 9-1-1 District for thirteen years and has served as president of the 9-1-1 Public Educators of Texas, editor of various newsletters and as regional coordinator for the Texas Emergency Number Association. She can be reached at (972) 221-0911 or via e-mail at PCross@denco.org.

Educating 9-1-1 Personnel To Educate the Public

By Bill Stevens, 9-1-1 Coordinator with Sarasota County, Florida

In addition to 9-1-1 coordinators, county and local management, communications center staff, first responders and citizens also should be educated.

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, 9-1-1 COORDINATORS HAVE EDUCATED themselves on Wireless Phase I and Phase II as a result of the passage of the Wireless Bill in 1996 and the subsequent rulings and state laws.

These rulings have had a great impact on the PSAPs and wireless carriers. They have changed technology, increased expenses, and changed procedures for handling 9-1-1 calls. They also have increased the knowledge needed by the coordinators who need to ensure that all federal and state requirements are met, the correct equipment is available, and the right procedures for handling the calls are in place and that they work with their LECS (Local Exchange Carriers, primary telephone company) and wireless carriers to implement both Phase I and Phase II. However, county and local management, communications center staff, first responders and citizens also should be educated.

Management

County management—including your Board of County Commissioners or County Council—should be aware of what the capabilities of the new system are. They also need to be aware of system limitations and that a majority of their constituents will not be able to utilize the system when it is first implemented. Being aware of the importance of public education also is important.

Public education needs to start long before implementation is complete because in many cases, the public and press contact county management first, especially when something happens that negatively affects the public at large. Make sure that man-

agement is prepared with the right knowledge and understands that, when it comes to replacing agency cellular phones, Phase II-compliant phones are a must.

Communications Center Staff

Communications center staff should understand the system and what it can do. While the basic procedures for handling a 9-1-1 call have not changed, the technology has. Your telecommunications now have to deal with the more varied information that they receive on their ALI screens and understand what type of wireless call they are receiving.

- Will the first screen they receive be Phase II information?
- Will they have to rebid?
- Can they rebid more than once and will they receive updated information each time?
- What are the differences in information received from each wireless carrier?

They also should understand the different solutions the wireless carriers use, if applicable in your area, as well as knowing what to do if the system fails.

- Can they locate a longitude/latitude plot if the automatic mapping fails?
- Can they convert a longitude/latitude if they receive it in the wrong format?

All of these concerns need to be addressed, so make sure that communications center staff is involved with the testing and implementation. It is strongly suggested that supervisors, training coordinators and trainers take the NENA Introduction to Wireless for PSAPs course.

Public Safety Personnel

Your first responders should be aware of the program's parameters. Failure to train these personnel will result in unmet expectations by the responders as well as requests for information that you may not be able to furnish. Agency management also should understand how important it will be to replace its cellular phones with Phase II-compliant phones when possible.

This training should start before Phase II implementation and continue throughout the process. Many agencies are hesitant to start their education program early, and some do very little at all. While the initial press releases and other public education pro-

grams may result in phone calls from the public, it is better to prepare them for Phase II rather than just announce that your county is compliant and then bear the brunt of all the phone calls or, even worse, the burden of unfulfilled expectations after a tragedy has occurred.

Citizens

All of the citizens served should be made aware of Phase II—what it will and will not do for them. This education should start before you make the final announcement that your county is fully Phase II-compliant. Let your citizens learn what you are doing and what the projected completion date is for the project. Although this may generate phone calls from the public, it is better that they know what the system will be capable of and what will be expected from the public before you go fully functional.

This is especially important because of what has happened in the last few years in several states: the incident in New York involving four young men who drowned and the two women in Florida who could not be located. Both of these incidents caused increasing coverage of this topic in the national press.

Even when PSAPs are fully Phase II, only a small percentage of citizens will be able to utilize the service when it's first deployed. In most cases, new phones will have to be purchased, and the average turnaround rate for customers to get new phones is two to three years. This, combined with the fact that the wireless carriers are not actively trying to sell the newer

Phase II-compliant phones, means that it will be quite some time before most cellular phone users have the new equipment. By educating the public early, they will understand how the system works and what they can expect. Without the needed public education, many citizens will think that when the county or the telephone companies make the announcement that your county is fully Phase II-compliant, they will be covered automatically and can be found when an emergency exists.

The bottom line is that all of the technology in the world will not solve the wireless 9-1-1 issues if there is no public education on the issue.

NENA's Operational Public Education Committee is currently working on a white paper on this subject that should be released by the end of the summer. This paper will identify phases and limitations of wireless implementation, examples of working with the media and special wireless educational efforts.

Bill Stevens has been in the 9-1-1 field since January, 1988. He started out as a telecommunicator/dispatcher with the Volusia County Sheriff's Office in Volusia County, FL. In the next fourteen years, Bill served as a CTO, shift supervisor, communications supervisor and 9-1-1 coordinator. He received ENP certification in 2000. In January of this year, Bill accepted the position of 9-1-1 coordinator with Sarasota County, FL, which has one consolidated dispatch center that receives all 9-1-1 calls and dispatches for two law enforcement agencies and seven fire departments.

Public education should start long before implementation is complete.

Even when PSAPs are fully Phase II, only a small percentage of citizens will be able to utilize the service when it's first deployed.

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