

1968

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS  
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The following sets forth some of the history of the reporting telephone numbers used to report to the fire and police agencies since the institution of the dial system for telephones.

In January 1968, in his "State of the Union Message" to Congress, President Johnson reported that the telephone companies had offered the use of the number "911" universally throughout the United States for the reporting of emergency situations to the police and fire services. The following day the President of the Bell System made a similar announcement to the newspapers to this effect. The Federal Communications Commission reported on this number at the same time. The Independent Telephone Company Association, however, was not consulted as to the use of this number, and at that time objected strongly to not being included in the matter.

Senator Ernest Gruening from Alaska, introduced a resolution in the U.S. Senate, and Congressman J. Edward Rosche of Indiana, introduced a similar resolution in the House. Congressman J. Edward Rosche, who introduced the first proposed emergency numbers resolution, asked that one number be given to fire services and one number be given to police services. They both, later, introduced resolutions calling for the one single number for both services, which were passed unanimously by the Congress at that time.

Federal Communications Commissioner Lee Loevinger, wrote a rather comprehensive report on this, dated February 27, 1968, outlining a great many of the difficulties, some of the operational results to be expected, and the need for a universal emergency communication number. This report has received wide circulation.

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On March 18, 1968, the Franklin Institute Research Laboratories held a one-day conference on this, at which they called in almost every type of emergency service which could possibly be included in any emergency reporting system. This meeting was held under Contract LEA 68-43, with the Federal Government for the U.S. Department of Justice, the Office of Law Enforcement Assistance, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the U.S. Public Health Service, the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, the National Highway Safety Bureau. The results of this conference were published in June, 1968. While the fire and police services were represented at this conference, it was dominated completely by other services.

Around 1917-1918, the City of Norfolk, Virginia, had two emergency numbers; Fire was "101", and Police was "102". The telephone company wire chief had "111". What has happened to Norfolk since they have gone along with the rest of the exchanges in the Bell System to 7-digit numbers, is unknown, except that they no longer have these 3-digit numbers for Fire and Police.

England uses the 3-digit emergency communications number of "999", however, it should be remembered that England is still using the 3-digit dial telephone number and that the telephone company is a government-owned entity, with one police force and one fire service to control all of England. While there are certain advantages to this system in England, no one would advocate such a system for the United States at this time.

Belgium also has a 3-digit emergency phone number. This number is "900". In the City of Brussels it is located at a central fire station. This center covers a city of 1-1/2 million people. There are eight lines in and four additional lines out. They light up all of the five switchboards. When any switchboard is answered, the calling phone number automatically appears in digits on a panel. A recorder also starts and the time and calling number are put on magnetic tape. The dispatcher takes the call and then sends assistance from the closest area. There are sixteen "900" centers in Belgium, which correspond to the sixteen phone districts in Belgium.

Prior to setting up a "900" center there was much confusion with people calling the doctor, ambulance, police, wrecker, and sometimes all of them at one time. The solution they devised was the "900" system which was established in 1964. One interesting thing developed. The "900" service was set up as a basic emergency service to save lives, so they do not by their own intent, notify the police when a call comes in. They do not want the police at the accident asking questions, perhaps delaying the evacuation of a patient to the hospital, and they do not want people to be afraid to call "900" for help, even if they have been involved in armed robbery.

The police in Antwerp, Belgium, were upset about this and put a wiretap on the "900" phones in that city. This was discovered and a great deal of government difficulty arose. Ultimately, however, the police were made to remove their wiretap, and it was agreed that this was basically an emergency service. The police do have access to the information after the incident. They have access to the tape or to any records in the files of the "900" service, but cannot use this prior to the time the victim is moved to the hospital or other emergency center.

Denmark has "000" centers, which is the Danish emergency number. This number receives about 30,000 calls a year for ambulances, 3000 a year for fire, and an undetermined number for police, because these calls are switched directly to the police center without a record being maintained. They have a great deal of trouble with false alarms on their central dispatch, and receive about 700 of these calls a day. They have no way of tracing the calls.

Every community in Sweden has a special number used to call for help. In addition to this, throughout Sweden there is a common phone number of "9" following by four zeros, or 90000, which can be used. Most emergency calls come in on "90000". This

number can be used in accidents, emergency ambulance, fire, rescue, door opening, electrical accidents, gas leaks, elevator stops, refrigerator leaks, doctors, flooding, pumping, oil leaks, police, chimney sweeps, storm damage and water leaks.

An article appearing in the International Association of Police Chiefs' magazine for February 1968, gives a rather detailed summary of the numbers game.

Returning to the State of California, it is interesting to note the California Highway Patrol has a state-wide number - ZENITH 12000 - which has been in use for some years to call the California Highway Patrol for assistance. How much this number is used, and the response, or ability to respond by the California Highway Patrol, has not been reported to my knowledge in the study of a new universal emergency telephone number.

The Police and Fire services have long been looking for a universal telephone reporting number that can be used by the public to report fires and police emergencies to them in the simplest possible way. They ask for one number for fire service, and one number for police service.

Many people consider that the use of the "0" operator call is the one reporting number for all emergencies. However, the telephone operator, working for the telephone company in a metropolitan area such as Southern California, is not always aware of all of the political boundaries which are within the telephone exchange area which she serves. In most Southern California exchanges, the "0" operator sends all the calls to one agency if the caller does not know which jurisdiction he is in. "0" operators, in the history of the use of this number, have in many, many cases shown an exemplary, cool-headed and cooperative spirit in handling emergency calls of people in need. However, one thing cannot be disregarded, and that is, that the telephone operator is not a part of the emergency services that are being called, but is a part of the telephone company where her major duties are servicing the requests of her ordinary customers for long distance service and other types of telephone service necessary for the telephone company's purposes. It has been estimated that emergency calls constitute less than 1% of her daily workload. It is not within the scope of this report to recommend that we do away with, or in any way, discontinue to use the "0" operator call.

The City of Hammond, Indiana, on March 1, 1968, instituted the use of the "911" in their local area, which comprises about 12,000 people and about 3000 telephones.

On October 1, 1968, the City of New York, in the five burroughs which constitute that City, is setting up a central communications center for the City of New York. The "911" emergency communications number will be used there on October 1st for police and ambulance services. On or about January 1, 1969, fire services will be added. All "911" calls will be routed by

dedicated lines to the central police headquarters. New York had five police dispatch centers that were consolidated on about July 1st. New York has no overlapping jurisdictions to worry about. New York already has a universal 7-digit number - 4401234 for police and ambulance. New York only deals with one phone company, with one basic system. Direct tie lines will be connected to the fire dispatcher headquarters and calls will be patched through from this central receiving center.

The Fire Department objected to not getting its own number, but the Mayor and his Staff intervened so that the system could be put in and tried out. Fire Department equipment and police equipment are not dispatched from the central communicating system. It does use a computer, however, in keeping the status of the police department's cars and incidents always up to date for the benefit of the dispatcher.

In January 1968, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors asked the County Administrative Officer, L.S. Hollinger, to investigate the use of the "911" emergency communication number in the County of Los Angeles. On January 26th, Mr. Hollinger replied to the Board of Supervisors, outlining what could or could not be done at that time with what knowledge was available.

A Los Angeles County Committee was formed, which included the Sheriff's Department, the County Fire Department, the Director of Communications for the County of Los Angeles, the League of California Cities, Los Angeles Division, and the City of Los Angeles, Office of Transportation, to work out the possibilities and probabilities for the County of Los Angeles. This committee has met from time to time and has worked out six alternate methods of instituting the use of the "911" in the County of Los Angeles.

Certain basic facts were established by the sub-committee, with the help of the telephone companies, as follows:

The telephone company operator will not take "911" calls.

The "911" concept is a feasible system for all operational, technical and jurisdictional conditions existing in Los Angeles County. For this or any approach to be successful, the "911" system must be universally adopted. There can be no jurisdictional islands where "911" is not in operation, nor can one area start it before all areas in the County are included in the Plan. All "911" calls for a given telephone exchange must terminate in one place. Two or more exchanges may be terminated in the same place. Telephone exchange boundaries do not coincide with political boundaries. One exchange is totally in County territory and five exchanges are completely inside the City of Los Angeles. Other exchanges include as many as nine political entities.

The "911" emergency number should be promoted as a secondary emergency number, emphasizing the existing 7-digit numbers as a faster, more direct way of calling an emergency agency.

Three basic methods of handling "911" calls with two

variations on each basic method, have been worked out. It is possible that all of these methods could be used in Los Angeles County. The telephone companies recommend that facilities now in existence be used to receive these calls. Time and experience will evolve more simplified or sophisticated procedures and methods of handling the "911" calls. It will ultimately be necessary for the governmental agencies in each telephone exchange area to meet and work out a satisfactory agreement on the handling of the "911" calls. There is not, at the present time, any agency within Los Angeles County that can bring together these City, State and County agencies for their mutual benefit.

The proposed methods of implementing this in Los Angeles County are as follows:

a) The establishment of a new "911" referral agency where all the calls would be received, terminated, and the messages relayed by the new "911" emergency agency. An alternative of this method would be for the calls to be received at the central receiving point and patched through by this new agency to the individual agencies in the various jurisdictions.

b) Designate a prime existing emergency agency to receive the calls. In this case, the prime agency would be the largest one in any one given telephone exchange area. Therefore, the major number of calls would be received, terminated and acted upon by this prime existing agency. Calls which they received which were outside the existing prime agency jurisdiction, would be relayed to the second agency, which would respond to the call.

A second method of using this, would be also to use the patch-through method which would give direct lines to the other agencies involved.

c) The third method would be the matter of complete rearrangement of the present system whereby a central dispatching agency would be set up to receive and handle all emergency situations of the two services, both police and fire. This third dispatch modification alternative seems to be least desirable of all for the multiple jurisdiction areas, however, there may be, within the City of Los Angeles or within the County, areas where this method could be put to great advantage with the aid of computers which would keep a record of the units to be dispatched.

In conclusion, it should be stated, that from the beginning of these conferences individuals in the emergency services have from time to time, advocated many alternatives to "911", but we must face the fact that we, in the United States, are using technological improvements for our convenience, and even our luxury, while we are negligent in applying these to crime

prevention and control, and to fire prevention and control, two of the most dreaded killers and terrors in our society.

Uniform nationwide fire reporting and police reporting telephone numbers will not end riots, eradicate criminals, nor prevent fires, but they will provide sensible tools which will make it possible to save a burning home or apartment house, or let local police authorities know when and where they are needed. More important, such a uniform number could put in the hands of every member of our highly mobile society, positive ways to improve his safety. Time is life, and time is money. The first, once gone, cannot be replaced.

The advantages to the public in the adoption of one easy, simple number to remember which can be used to summon aid directly in any emergency, would seem to outweigh whatever problems may be involved in getting this universal number into service. Many have advised waiting until further technological developments would give them what they particularly wish. This is not a time to wait. It is a time to use what we have today and what we can implement today, to accomplish this purpose.

Compare the concept of the "911" not with what we may have in the future, such as the year 2000; compare it with what we have today; the situation that exists at the present moment in the County of Los Angeles and in the State of California. The time for our concern is NOW! Our population growth continues. The problems which plague 200 million Americans today, will bother 400 million Americans by the turn of the century. We had better be prepared for more and bigger emergencies. Jurisdictional problems of that day may well be more complex. We must talk to each other now and we must talk aloud. Further, and more important, we must ACT!

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