

## DISPATCH Magazine On-Line

### 311 Non-Emergency Systems

Besides the three-digit 911 emergency number, America's telephone companies and the FCC have adopted other three-digit numbers, including 311. It was first implemented locally by the Baltimore (Md.) Police Department on Oct. 2, 1996 to handle non-emergency police calls. The 311 number was then approved for nationwide use by the FCC on Feb. 19, 1997 after President Bill Clinton endorsed the idea during a 1996 Sacramento (Calif.) campaign speech as part of his community-involved policing program.

As of Sept. 2008, about 55.8 million residents have access to the 311 number, or about 18% of the population.

Prior to 311, Baltimore had **no** non-emergency 7-digit police number for citizens to report non-emergency incidents--citizens dialed 911 for **everything**. BPD officials reported (naturally) that up to 60% of their 911 calls were non-emergency incidents, which burdened their police calltakers. After installing 311, BPD experienced a dramatic drop in 911 calls, and a resulting decline in abandoned 911 calls, answer times, etc. After the FCC's ruling that reserved 311 nationwide, organizations such as APCO and NENA opposed so-called N-1-1 telephone numbers (311, 511, 711, etc.), fearing they would confuse the public when they encountered an emergency situation.



Since then, 311 implementation has been very slow, and has been focused in one of two areas:

- **Operated by the police department** to field non-emergency calls, to help reduce the number of non-emergency 911 calls received (Baltimore, Md.; [San Jose](#), Calif.; Bethel, Alas.; Oklahoma State University; [Detroit](#), Las Vegas)
- **Operated by the city** (public works, independent service agency, etc.) to field so-called "city service" calls such as potholes, fallen trees, noise complaints, street or traffic signals not working, etc. (Chicago, [New York](#), Houston and Dallas)

So, in some cases 311 is allied with the local police or fire comm center. In other cases, the number has no connection whatsoever to emergency communications, and is handled by a separate call center administered by the city or county.


Read the [opinion of one person on 311](#)...


#### How Does It Work?

Calls to 311 are routed either to a separate center and handled by non-public safety personnel, or routed to the same center where 911 and other public safety calls are handled. As well, a 311 call might actually be an emergency, and a

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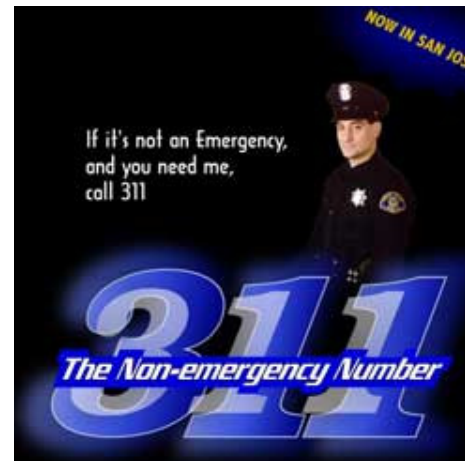
911 might actually be a non-emergency. This set of circumstances creates several possibilities for call handling.

A non-emergency 311 call routed to a separate center is answered, entered into a computer, and the information is routed to the proper city/county agency for handling. A 311 call routed to the 911 center is usually queued **behind** any unanswered 911 calls. Only when there are **no** pending 911 calls do the 311 calls ring in to the calltakers.

If a 311 call routed to separate center turns out to be an emergency, there is usually some method for transferring the call to the associated 911 center. In some cases, the 311 calltakers are trained to handle 911 calls, and enter them into their computer, and the information is immediately visible in the 911 center for dispatch.

Conversely, if a 911 call turns out to be a non-emergency, the call-taker usually has some method of transferring the call to the 311 center.

The New York City's 311 system is particularly instructive on how such a system is used for large cities-- the city's Taxi & Limosine Commission received 123,349 service calls on 311 during fiscal 2004, which is more calls than most cities receive in an entire year for **all** types of municipal service. Also note that "CFD & Freon Removal" is consistently among the top three reasons for dialing 311, a situation that smaller cities just may not experience. [Download](#) (pdf) the latest [performance statistics](#), and [neighborhood statistics](#) that shows types of calls in lists and on maps. Full (and very complete!) reports on the operation of New York City's 311 system are listed [here](#).



## Resources

- Here is our [map of the cities with 311](#) that we know about--[e-mail us](#) if you have additions or changes.
- The company [Winbourne & Costas](#) has a collection of information about 311 operations.
- We have chronicled the evolution of 311 in our publication over the past years since Baltimore implemented the first system. Check our [story archive](#) for a full list of stories about 311.
- AT&T first [introduced a toll-free 10-digit telephone number](#) for reporting non-emergency incidents. However, that plan was soon dropped in favor of using 311.
- We also wrote about a 311 [committee report](#) during the 1999 Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) annual conference. APCO published a [position statement](#) on so-called N-1-1 number, including 311, a summary of [311 issues](#), and a summary of their [committee report](#).
- The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the International Municipal Signal Association (IMSA) opposed the assignment of 311 in [comments they filed](#) with the FCC.
- The Department of Justice's COPS program has information about their [grant program](#) for 311. They also have a [Web page](#) on the subject, and have published an [evaluation](#) of 311 for handling non-emergency calls, and a [fact sheet](#). [Acrobat, pdf format]

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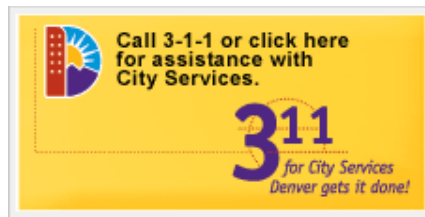
- APCO organized [Project 35](#) to study the use of N-1-1 telephone numbers.
- NENA wrote President Bill Clinton [a letter](#) after Clinton's campaign speech supported 311.
- The Las Vegas Metro Police Department's [Web site page](#) on their 311 system for basic information
- The [San Jose Police Web site](#) for "When to Call 311" information
- The Washington (DC) 311 [Web page](#)
- Read our coverage of the 2001 APCO conference, during which there was a [seminar on 311](#).
- **Hot!** California took four years to study the effectiveness of 311 and 7-digit non-emergency numbers in San Jose and San Diego respectively. They issued a [61-page report](#) that concludes...well, the data didn't support a definitive conclusion. [Acrobat, pdf format 345k]
- California's legislature passed a local funding bill in Fall 2001, but it was vetoed by Gov. Gray Davis. Read the veto message and full bill text [here](#).
- Here is some [tariff information](#) about 311 from Southern Bell. [Acrobat, pdf format]
- The U.S. Conference of Mayors issued a "[National Action Plan for Safety and Security](#)" that included 311 recommendations. [Acrobat, pdf format]
- The city of Los Angeles intends to implement 311 in Sept. 2002 for non-emergency city services--check their [Web page](#) for some (slightly outdated) information on the implementation process.
- **Hot!** The University of Cincinnati has published a [310-page study](#), "Managing Citizen Calls to the Police: An Assessment of Non-Emergency Call Systems," which looks at Baltimore, Buffalo (NY), Dallas and Phoenix. The study was funded by the COPS Office and administered by the National Institute of Justice. 6-3-2003 [Acrobat, pdf format, **Warning: 13.5 Mb!**]
- In 2002 the city of Oakland (Calif.) considered a [proposal](#) by the city manager to create a 311, non-emergency city services center. It includes a comparison of systems from five other cities, and detailed plans on converting the Oakland Assistance Center operation to handling 311 calls. (Acrobat, pdf)
- A "[process and impact evaluation](#)" performed by Austin (Tex.) on a proposed 311 system, published by the DOJ. [pdf]
- New York City's 311 information [privacy policy](#) (pdf).
- [Study](#) of Baltimore's CitiStat (311) program (pdf)
- Baltimore's on-line city [service request form](#)
- New York City 311 system [background](#) from Accenture
- New York City 311 system annual and monthly call [statistics](#), and [Mayor's Management Report](#) (pdf) detailing 311 calls attributable to each city agency.
- **Hot!** Department of Justice [publication](#), "Managing Calls to the Police With 911/311 Systems." (pdf)
- **Hot!** Department of Justice [publication](#), "Calling 311: Guidelines for Policymakers." (pdf)
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) debuts its 311 center [news story [#1](#) [#2](#)] [[Powerpoint presentation to council](#)]
- Detroit 311 [brochure](#) (pdf)
- In Sept. 2005 an independent auditor released a [study](#) of Houston's 311 system. [pdf]
- An academic [paper](#) on 311 and its use during natural disasters. [pdf]



- A [case study](#) of Danbury's (Conn.) 311 system and its planning. [pdf]
- Revealing news [story](#) on San Francisco's 311 in the months after the 2007 start-up.
- [Article](#) in **Federal Computer Week** about three cities' experience with 311 systems.
- Detroit (Mich.) 311 [jingle](#) (mp3)
- California [list](#) of cities with 311 service
- QScend [video](#) on Newark (NJ) 311 system
- Harvard University [study](#) on "Nine Imperatives for Leadership of 311-Enabled Governments" (pdf)
- [Report](#) (2007) on possible state-wide implementation of 311 in New Jersey (pdf)
- The [Open Planning Project](#) is working on open source 311 software **NEW!**

### Source of 311 Software

- [ActiveGovernment](#) - their software solutions provide 311 contact centers and support and citizen service management tools, as well as automated payment management and web content management.
- [AINS Inc.](#) - Markets fully integrated, web-based, workflow-driven, case management system for handling citizen complaints and requests for information.
- [Automated Business Systems & Services Inc.](#) - markets EREACT software originally developed for Mobile (Ala.)
- [Govt.com](#) - markets its "i311" software to manage answering questions, with a downloadable demo version available. It also markets a separate application to manage work orders (OurTown2000), and to offer on-line fees, licenses, permits, etc. (ECitizen).
- [Lagan Technologies Ltd.](#) - CRM for public and private-sector operations
- [Publisafe](#) - markets 311 Reports for handling 311 calls and related incidents
- [Siebel Systems Inc.](#) - provides a Citizen Response Solution that provides analysis, case and incident management, and citizen targeted outreach.
- [SunTrack](#) - markets software to track government services reported on 311.
- [Microsoft Inc.](#) - handles phone, e-mail and Web-based citizen contacts. Download (pdf) a [flyer](#).
- [Motorola](#) - markets a software program that manages 311 operations, including answering questions, entering work orders, and performing follow-ups.
- [QScend Technologies Inc.](#) - software for handling 311 call events



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