

# 911 system stands test of first day

## Post staff report

Bud Rauf burst through the door of a neighbor's home in Miami Heights. He saw a woman whose bloody finger was caught in the clenched teeth of her 13-year-old daughter convulsing on the floor.

Rauf, an off-duty communications supervisor for Hamilton County, did what he has trained his employees to do. He dialed 911.

"It really worked great, and to know I only had to dial three numbers instead

of seven," Rauf said Wednesday, the first day of 911 service in Greater Cincinnati.

Although it was operating before, the emergency phone system officially went on line at noon Wednesday in Hamilton, Clermont and Butler counties in Ohio and the Northern Kentucky counties of Kenton, Campbell and Boone.

The calls that came in ranged from people reporting a fire in Over-the-Rhine and a car accident in Sharonville to scores of people who just wanted to see if 911 really worked and children playing with the phone.

"Just testing, honey," a caller told Vickie Butcher, a city emergency operator, in a routine that became more familiar as the day wore on.

Cincinnati's emergency dispatching center received 625 "911" calls in the 24 hours ending at 7:30 a.m. today, said police Sgt. Joe Atherton. Of those, about half were people testing the system.

The Hamilton County Communications Center received 380 "911" calls in the 18 hours ending at midnight, said William Hinkle of the center. Of those, 315 were from testers or children playing

with the phone.

One woman even called 911 to ask about the test scheduled to be given next month in the city's hiring of 13 operators. "What questions are on the test?" she asked.

Officials are discouraging people from testing the system, but for those who insist, authorities ask that the caller hang on long enough to tell the operator he is just testing. A response is required on all "silent calls."

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# 911

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Even if a caller hangs up without speaking, the three-digit emergency computer system provides the phone number and address of the caller to the operator. In each case, the number must be called back. If there is no answer, a police officer is dispatched to the site at which the call originated in case it is a real emergency.

Dispatchers in Oxford, Ohio, received six such calls and sent officers to the addresses provided by the computer. None of the calls were for emergencies, dispatcher Linda Ashbrook said. Oxford police received 41 calls and only two required emergency service.

Wednesday, a person in the AT&T building on East Fourth Street hung up after calling Cincinnati's communications center. When no one answered the operator's call back, a police officer was sent to the building to find another person just testing the phone.

But it was a house fire on Magnolia Street in Over-the-Rhine that prompted two people in nearby buildings to call the city's center on Ezzard Charles Drive.

One of the callers hung up when the operator took his call. When the operator called him back, he said he thought he was supposed to hang up.

While a caller's address and phone number flash on a screen for the operator — making help available to stroke victims, invalids, children and the like — callers who can be encouraged

to talk to the operator in order to provide details of the problem.

No one was injured in the Over-the-Rhine fire, which caused \$5,000 damage.

In another emergency, someone at Princeton High School called 911 to report a multicar accident on northbound Interstate 75 between Sharon Road and Interstate 275. Four people were taken to area hospitals for minor injuries.

Other dispatching centers, including those in Northern Kentucky, reported only the following minor startup difficulties:

■ At the Butler County center in Hamilton, 10 calls to the service were received in the first two hours. None were emergencies.

Hal Shepherd, assistant city manager in Hamilton, said the 911 system worked very well, but a few callers used the old emergency number. Dispatching of police and firefighters went smoothly, he said. Two emergencies requiring quick response were a shooting at 8 p.m. Wednesday and a train crash at 3:30 p.m. Wednesday on North Gilmore Road in Fairfield, Shepherd said. One person was injured in the wreck and the man shot died an hour later.

■ At Cincinnati's center, an undetermined number of calls that came in as 911 actually were placed by people using a seven-digit number that contains the sequence 911, such as 891-1234. These resulted from calls that were dialed too fast by a person or automatic dialer, a dispatching supervisor said. Cincinnati Bell is looking into

the problem, which many other cities with 911 also have experienced.

But for Tammy French, the girl Bud Rauf helped, 911 worked perfectly.

Her mother, Betty French, said she and Tammy were sitting at the breakfast table. A newspaper was opened to the front page, which coincidentally featured a story about the new 911 system accompanied by a picture of Rauf demonstrating the new equipment.

Tammy began shaking and fell across a chair. Mrs. French quickly pulled Tammy into her lap.

"She was turning blue," Mrs. French said. "I was trying to get her some air. My finger just slipped in there and she clamped down on it."

Mrs. French sent Rauf's niece, whom she babysits, for help. Rauf rushed across the yard, checked the girl's eyes and felt for a pulse, then called 911.

But he couldn't hear the operator, Pam Ferguson, on the other end.

"I just hoped they could hear me," Rauf said.

The 911 system kicked in and automatically flashed the address on Ms. Ferguson's computer screen. She dispatched a Miami Heights life squad that arrived at 8:25, nine minutes after Rauf's phone call.

Both mother and child were treated at hospitals and released.

*Post staff reporters Molly Kavanaugh, France Griggs, Terry Boschert and Len Penix contributed to this report.*