

# Call 911 — but just for help, officials say

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Sometimes, they call to find out when the Reds are playing.

Sometimes, they call to find out where to park for an event.

As part of a \$25,000 public-awareness campaign, Cincinnati safety officials are now urging residents to use the 911 emergency number — but only when they truly need it.

"Call 911 if you need us," said Council Member David Mann, chair of council's law committee. "But if you don't truly need us, think of another way to get to the hospital."

University of Cincinnati and city officials this week launched a public-awareness campaign to encourage proper use of the two-year-old 911 system. As part of the campaign, officials are passing out a free booklet on 911 usage. The booklet is available from any city fire station by calling 352-6220, or by returning the coupon included in an upcoming newspaper advertisement.

Police Capt. Kenneth Schneider, supervisor of the city's police and fire dispatching center, said the center receives about 2,600 phone calls per day on the 911 system's 16 trunk lines.

Although about 97 percent of fire calls come in on 911 lines, only about

47 percent of the police calls come in on 911 lines. The other calls are received on seven-digit numbers, which require dispatchers to manually take down information on where callers are located.

Another problem officials identified were callers hanging up on 911 lines. Such hang-ups require dispatchers to call back to verify no emergency exists, tying them up for receiving other calls.

Schneider said that when people can't be reached on the other end of the line, dispatchers must send a police officer to investigate the address. Such investigations happen about 1,000 times per month. On average, he said those run tie up officers for about 42 minutes each time.

The three-digit emergency line became available in August 1988. The Cincinnati 911 system includes Hamilton, Butler and Clermont counties in Ohio and Kenton, Campbell and Boone counties in Northern Kentucky.

Ohio residents pay about 12 cents a month for the service; Boone and Kenton county residents pay 15 cents a month; Campbell County pays 17 cents a month.

About half the country's estimated 250 million people can call 911 for help. The system originated in Great Britain in 1937 and has been operating in the U.S. for about 20 years.