Tips for Dialing 9-1-1

9-1-1 is your connection to police, fire and ambulance. Our call-takers and dispatchers are highly trained, dedicated professionals who will get you the help you need. Please remember these tips whenever you call 9-1-1:

- Use 9-1-1 in emergency situations that require police, fire or ambulance.
- When an E-Comm 9-1-1 call-taker answers they will ask if you need “police, fire or ambulance.” The call-taker will also confirm for which city.
- Your call will be immediately transferred. Stay on the line and follow instructions. Your 9-1-1 call-taker will stay on the line with you to make sure your call is answered by the agency you need.
- Be prepared to answer questions. Listen carefully, speak clearly and try to remain calm.
- Know your location at all times. This is particularly important if you are calling from a cell phone.
- Don’t program 9-1-1 into speed dial. It takes a split second to dial 9-1-1, and when it’s pre-programmed you can dial 9-1-1 accidentally.
- If you do dial 9-1-1 accidentally, please stay on the line and tell us. If you hang up we don’t know if you are okay.
- Teach your non-English speaking family and friends to learn the English word for the language they do speak, in case a translator is needed.

For many more tips visit www.ecomm.bc.ca

The History of 9-1-1

The numbers “9-1-1” were selected for emergency service for a number of police and fire districts, the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) and the Whistler area. (E-Comm also provides 9-1-1 service for the Greater Vancouver Regional District, the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) and the Whistler area. E-Comm also provides emergency dispatch services for a number of local police and fire departments.

9-1-1 in the Number

9-1-1 is synonymous with getting help. Most of us know that when in trouble, dialing 9-1-1 will give us quick access to police, fire and ambulance. We teach our children how to use it and we’ve come to accept it as part of our every day lives. But beyond dialing 9-1-1, how many of us actually know it works and how to make it work best for those who need it most? In this two part series, we will take a look at the history of 9-1-1, how it works, including technological advancements and tips for using the service properly.

Story continued inside
phones has had both positive and negative impacts for 9-1-1. It has increased the public’s ability to call 9-1-1 (it is estimated there are more than 500,000 cell phone users in the GVRD alone), but that has also meant a significant increase in wireless cell volumes which take longer to process because until recently, wireless phone companies did not provide any caller information including your phone number. 9-1-1-call takers now receive information through property taxes and then remit payment to E-Comm. When a caller dials 9-1-1, the E-Comm call-taker asks, “do you need police, fire, or ambulance?” (the call-taker will also continue for wireless number and then connect the caller as quickly as possible to the agency the caller has requested.) The E-Comm call-taker will remain on the line with the caller until the agency answers. The entire process usually takes around 25-30 seconds.

If a caller is unsure of what service they need, the E-Comm 9-1-1 call-taker is trained to ask a few quick questions to help determine which agency it requires and will connect the caller accordingly. Once connected to the agency, the call-taker can, at any time, also contact other agencies to assist with response. For example, if the BC Ambulance Service receives a call where police presence is required, they will contact the appropriate department/attachment for assistance.

Once the call is down-streamed (transferred) to the agency the caller has requested, the E-Comm 9-1-1 call-taker dis-engages from the call and moves on to answering other 9-1-1 calls.

Some of the agency which the E-Comm down-streams calls to are located in the E-Comm facility and others are not (see chart).

There have been significant 9-1-1 technology enhancements since 9-1-1 was introduced to Canada in 1959. Call-takers now have the ability to see the phone number from which the 9-1-1 call has been dialed (if they call from a landline) and the address associated with that telephone number. This has greatly assisted in emergency response. In cases where the call could not communicate their location, help was still able to be dispatched because the address information was known.

The introduction of cellular

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Continued from front cover.

Meet our Board…

Mayor Lois Jackson (Delta)

Represents Corporation of Delta on the E-Comm Board

- 34-year resident of Delta
- Mayor since 1999, served as Councillor from 1973-1999
- On the E-Comm Board since 1999

Lois Jackson, you might say, has emergency service in her blood. As a young girl in Ontario, she watched her father work days to keep the local nickel fac- tory-running during World War II (at the direction of the Armed Forces) and volunteer at night by serving in their “home guard,” helping residents ready themselves for emergency situations. It was her first exposure to emergency preparedness and likely one of the reasons why public safety is so important to her today.

Why did you want to be on the E-Comm Board?

There are certainly less challenging prospects than consolidating emergency communications. Preparation has always been important to me—it’s the best insurance policy. If we don’t have reliable shared communications, then people will be isolated in a disaster. We cannot be complacent about this. I have to admit that back in 1999 when I first joined the Board I was not a full supporter, but I can tell you my perspective has shifted 180 degrees! We cannot separate technology from public safety. When I first joined the Board it was more about curiosity and even some skepticism. But I’ve come to appreciate that this is an extremely worthwhile endeavor and a model that is being looked at all over the world. When the 2010 Olympic evaluation commission was here, we heard that they were extremely impressed with our facility and its kind of feedback that should make us all proud.

What are your frustrations with regard to emergency services/communications?

I get frustrated that we sometimes forget the enormity of this project. A lot of work has been done in a very short timeframe. We are leaders. I also think that we tend to forget that people who work in emergency communications are heroes—I think it’s important that we recognize the jobs all of our emergency personnel do. It’s not easy.

What are some of your future hopes and goals for E-Comm?

I feel that we need to do more outreach to the remaining communities that are not using the radio system. It’s a big challenge—but I am totally convinced this is the way to go. It’s not enough that people “think” they are safe—they have to be safe.

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What are some of your future hopes and goals for E-Comm?

Even in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows—so far removed from New York—there was, and is still, nervousness. There is more emphasis on civic security. You know, before September 11 there was a cover off of a water main, you’d just send a water guy to fix it. Now we send someone to check the water too and the police check for suspicious activity. I believe that when people in New York talk about how we do things in our region… then we know we are onto something right.

Councillor Jon Harris (Maple Ridge)

Represents Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows on the E-Comm Board

- 65-year resident of Maple Ridge
- Served as Councillor since 1990
- On the E-Comm Board since 2000

Jon Harris, a dedicated Councillor, Notary Public and member of the Maple Ridge Volunteer Fire Department for ten years, says he’s on the Board of E-Comm at the pleasure of Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge—the two municipalities he represents. “Both municipalities gracefully re-appointed me,” he says. “They recognize that continuity is good and both are very supportive.”

Why is important is it for your municipality to be part of a shared radio system?

When I talk to police members in my municipality, they tell me how much they like the system. It works well and they are glad to be a part of it. How can we expect police and other emergency workers to do their work well without a strong communications system? Shared systems are an idea whose time has come.

What are some of E-Comm’s notable achievements?

You know, there was a time when it was a minor miracle to get people onto the radio system and into dispatch. For different reasons. Now, more and more agencies are approaching us first. It is happening slowly, but surely. More will come. The challenge is convincing people, showing them we have long-term vision, long-term plans. My vision is that one day everyone is using one system—one 9-1-1 system, one radio system and that no one community will be denied the service. I am proud to be part of a new concept—it’s satisfying knowing you are helping in a small way to build something great.