

FCC Consumer Advisory

Accidental 9-1-1 Calls From Wireless Phones Pose Risk to Public Safety

Individual 911 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) have estimated that between 25% and 70% of their wireless calls are unintentional, clogging up their phone lines and risking their ability to respond to real emergencies. Here's how the problem occurs and what you can do to avoid making an accidental 9-1-1 call.

Many older wireless phones are equipped with a feature designed to automatically dial 9-1-1 in an emergency, for example, when one key - typically the "9" - is held down for a few seconds. These phones often come pre-programmed with the feature already turned on. The user may not even be aware of the feature or that it has been activated. (Very few **new** wireless phones have this feature, and often, if they do, the user needs to activate it.) The problem occurs when one of these older wireless phones, especially "candy bar" types of wireless phones (with an open-faced design), bumps up against some item, or a key on the keypad is accidentally pressed while in the user's purse, briefcase, pocket, or on his or her belt.

The accidental 9-1-1 calls cause a major problem for the public safety community, which spends time and resources to determine whether the 9-1-1 calls are real or accidental. Because the public safety operator does not know whether the 9-1-1 call is accidental or real, the public safety operator's general practice is to remain on the line in an attempt to make that determination. In some cases, if no one is on the line, the operator can disconnect and call the user back to verify whether the original call was accidental. However, if no one answers, the operator may be compelled to spend more time trying to reach the caller or even to dispatch emergency services to the caller's location. These efforts not only waste resources, but they also divert scarce public safety personnel from other 9-1-1 calls reporting real emergencies.

Avoiding Accidental 9-1-1 Calls

Visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau's (CGB) Web site, www.fcc.gov/cgb, for further information on this issue and links to related Web sites, including the Web site of the National Emergency Number Association (NENA).

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Consumers can assist in efforts to eliminate the accidental call problem by following these simple steps:

- Locking keypads using the keypad lock feature. Keypad locks, some of which can be programmed to activate automatically, prevent a phone from responding to keystrokes until the user unlocks the keypad with a short combination of key presses.
- Turning off the auto-dial 9-1-1 feature. Check your user manual to find out how to turn off the feature.
- Refrain from programming your wireless phone to speed or automatically dial 9-1-1.

Many major wireless handset **manufacturers** and wireless **carriers** are also taking steps to help solve this problem. For example, all wireless carriers have requested that manufacturers turn the auto-dial 9-1-1 feature off prior to shipment of new handsets to the carriers and/or not offer the auto-dial 9-1-1 feature as an option.

Effective January 1, 2003, all Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association (CTIA) -certified handsets will **not** be pre-programmed at the factory to dial 9-1-1.

For further information or to determine whether your wireless phone has the auto-dial 9-1-1 feature, check the user manual, call your wireless service provider, or check the Web site of the manufacturer of your wireless phone. Also, visit the FCC Wireless Bureau's Web site, wireless.fcc.gov, for further information and a copy of the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau Staff Report, "Prevention of Unintentional Wireless 911 Calls," DA 02-3413, released December 11, 2002.

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