

# NENA Call Answering Standard/Model Recommendation



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Prepared by:

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National Emergency Number Association  
1700 Diagonal Rd, Suite 500  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
202.466.4911  
or [commleadership@nena.org](mailto:commleadership@nena.org)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document has been developed by the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) Standard Operating Procedures Committee, Call-taking Working Group.

The following individuals are recognized for their contributions in development of this document.

<b>Development Members:</b>	<b>Company/Agency</b>
Steve O’Conor – SOP Chair	Brevard County, FL
Sandi Hutchcroft – Call-taking WG Chair	Dubuque County, IA
Paul Adams	Huntington City, IN
Amy Bedford	Greater Harris County, TX
Clayton Carter	Huntington County, IN
Sara Floyd	Williamson County
Susan Makky	St Charles County, MO
Frances Self	Palm Bay, FL

<b>Editing Members:</b>	<b>Company/Agency</b>
Mark Adler	Palm Beach County, FL
Tom Donohue	Minneapolis, MN
Linda Draughn-Woloski	9-1-1 Consulting
John Haynes	Chester County, PA
Carlos Noriega	Miami Beach, FL

<b>Contributors:</b>	<b>Company/Agency</b>
Tom Breen	BellSouth
Bonnie Hueg	NJ Office of Emergency Telecommunications Services
Eric N. Parry, ENP	Priority Dispatch

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## 1 Executive Overview

This document has been developed to serve as a model standard operating procedure for the call-taking function within Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs).

To provide uniformity and consistency in the handling of 9-1-1, other emergency calls and administrative non-emergency calls, the following call-taking standards are recommended:

- Operational level of service
- Order of answering priority
- Answering protocol
- Information gathering
- Call transfer

In addition, this document provides guidelines for handling non-standard calls, such as abandoned, disconnects, misdials, unintentional, prank and misrouted calls (including nomadic VoIP calls).

A recommended course of action is described which will enable the telecommunicator to address data failures, such as the loss of ANI or ALI, equipment problems and redundant calls.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 Purpose and Scope.** These guidelines have been developed to facilitate call handling in the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP).
- 2.2 Reason to Implement.** This document has been issued to serve as a Model Standard Operating Procedure for the call-taking function within Public Safety Answering Points.
- 2.3 Benefits.** Use of this Model Standard Operating Procedure will standardize the method of call handling across jurisdictional boundaries. This will:
- Provide consistency in call handling of emergency and non-emergency calls
  - Improve service
- 2.4 Technical Impacts Summary.** None

### 2.5 Document Terminology

The terms "shall ", "must" and "required" are used throughout this document to indicate required parameters and to differentiate from those parameters that are recommendations. Recommendations are identified by the words "desirable" or "preferably".

### 2.6 Reason for Reissue

NENA reserves the right to modify this document. Whenever it is reissued, the reason(s) will be provided in this paragraph.

56-005.1 issued 8/31/2017 to correct discrepancies in page headers and cover page and remove word 'draft.'

### 2.7 Cost Factors

Not applicable

### 2.8 Cost Recovery Considerations

Not Applicable

### 2.9 Acronyms/Abbreviations

Some of the acronyms/abbreviations used in this document may not have been included in the NENA Master Glossary. After initial approval of this document, they will be included. Link to the master glossary is located at: <http://www.nena.org/?page=Glossary>

<b>The following Acronyms are used in this document:</b>	
ALI	Automatic Location Identification
ANI	Automatic Number Identification
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
PSAP	Public Safety Answering Point
TTY/TDD	Teletypewriter/Telecommunications Device for the Deaf
VoIP	Voice over Internet Protocol

<b>The following <i>new terms</i> are included in this recommendation:</b>	
Nomadic VoIP call	Call generated by a VoIP user from other than their originally provisioned fixed location using the terminal equipment from that location (i.e.: VoIP handset, laptop, VoIP terminal, PC).
<b>The following definition of terms are amended by this recommendation:</b>	
ALI	Automatic Location Identification. The automatic display at the PSAP of the telephone number, the address/location and supplementary emergency services information of the telephone from which a call originates.

### 3 Call taking standards

**3.1 Standard for answering 9-1-1 Calls.** Ninety percent (90%) of all 9-1-1 calls arriving at the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) shall be answered within ten (10) seconds during the busy hour (the hour each day with the greatest call volume, as defined in the NENA Master Glossary). Ninety-five (95%) of all 9-1-1 calls should be answered within twenty (20) seconds.

**3.2 Order of Answering Priority.** It is the responsibility of on duty telecommunicators to answer all in-coming calls. All phone calls will be answered in order of priority. 1<sup>st</sup> priority will be the 9-1-1 and emergency 7/10 digit phone lines; 2<sup>nd</sup> priority will be non-emergency lines and 3<sup>rd</sup> priority will be the administrative and/or internal phone lines.

**3.3 Standard Answering Protocol – 9-1-1 lines.** All 9-1-1 lines at a primary Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) shall be answered beginning with “9-1-1.”

*Comment: The correct answering statement is “Nine-One-One”, never “Nine Eleven”. Additional information or questions may be added, as in: “9-1-1, what is the emergency?”, or “9-1-1 what is the address of the emergency?”. Other information, such as the operator identification number or that the line is recorded may also be added. It is recommended that the agency not be identified when answering emergency lines to avoid confusing the caller and delaying response to alternate-routed calls.*

**3.4 Standard Answering Protocol – non-emergency lines.** When answering non-emergency lines, the answering agency should be clearly identified to the caller.

*Comment: Examples include: “County dispatch, Operator Number \_\_\_” or “Agency name, may I help you.”*

**3.5 Non-emergency calls received on emergency lines.** If a call is of a non-emergency nature and it is received on an emergency telephone line, the telecommunicator will advise the caller that they have called on an emergency line and will direct the caller to a non-emergency line. It is not recommended that the call be transferred to an administrative line, since that may tie up the 9-1-1 trunks

*Comment: It is imperative that only “legitimate” emergency calls be handled on the 9-1-1 system because the 9-1-1 telephone network has limited number of dedicated trunks/lines – tying up these circuits with non-emergency calls could result in a “real” emergency call being blocked or routed to an alternate agency. Calls are answered by the PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point) in the order that they are received. Non-emergency calls on the 9-1-1- system will cause a delay in answering legitimate emergency calls.*

**3.6 Standard for information gathering.** The telecommunicator will obtain the basic information from the caller. At a minimum, this information should include: the address or exact location of the incident, call back number, type of emergency, time of occurrence, hazards, identity of those involved and their location.



**Comment:** For those calls that are transferred to another telecommunicator for dispatch of emergency services, it is important to obtain certain minimum information in the event the call is lost during transfer. “Hazards” includes any potential hazards at the scene, including the presence of weapons; it may also be appropriate to determine the relationship between the caller and those involved (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> party).

**3.6.1 Address verification.** The telecommunicator will verify all addresses reported. If the address provided by the caller matches the ALI display, the address may be considered verified. In the event there is a discrepancy, additional steps must be taken to verify the location of the incident being reported, such as repeating the address twice and/or annunciating each digit of the address if necessary to clarify.

**Comment:** Address verification is critical to the delivery of emergency services.

**3.7 Transferring emergency calls.** When emergency calls need to be transferred to another PSAP, the telecommunicator will transfer the call without delay. The telecommunicator will advise the caller: “Please do not hang up; I am connecting you with (name of the agency).” The telecommunicator should stay on the line until the connection is complete and all pertinent information has been relayed to the answering PSAP.

**Comment:** For those calls that are transferred to another telecommunicator for dispatch of emergency services, it is important to insure that the call has been transferred to the proper agency and that all necessary information has been relayed. If an emergency call must be handled by a secondary PSAP or dispatch authority, the call should be transferred rather than providing the caller with the telephone number of the secondary PSAP and advising them to call there instead.

**3.8 Wireless 9-1-1 Calls.** Wireless 9-1-1 Calls shall be handled in accordance with NENA Guidelines for Minimum Response to Wireless 9-1-1 Calls, Document 56-001.

**3.9 Non-standard calls.**

**3.9.1 Abandoned calls/disconnects.** The telecommunicator will attempt a call back when a 9-1-1 call is routed to the PSAP and the call disconnects before the telecommunicator can determine if assistance is needed. The telecommunicator will call the number back once to make this determination. If the phone is busy or there is no answer, additional attempts to contact the caller will not be made by the telecommunicator. If the callback attempt goes to voice mail, no message will be left.

**Comment:** A consistent agency policy for documenting and/or responding to these events should be developed at the local level.

- 3.9.2 Silent calls.** In compliance with Public Law 101-336, also known as the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, all silent calls will be interrogated with a TTY/TDD to determine if the caller is attempting to report an emergency using a special communications device for hearing impaired individuals.
- 3.9.3 9-1-1 Misdial.** A call is classified as a 9-1-1 misdial when the caller stays on the line and admits to the misdial.
- 3.9.4 Unintentional 9-1-1 Call.** A call is classified as unintentional when the 9-1-1 personnel can hear conversation, radio, etc. in the background and have listened sufficiently and checked with a TTY/TDD to determine that there is no indication of an emergency situation.
- 3.9.5 Prank calls.** Telecommunicators will call back a suspected prank caller. Prank calls should be treated as a real emergency until proven otherwise. The called party will be questioned to determine if further action is needed or a response is required.

*Comment: Some agencies may require a response in these (abandoned, silent, misdial, unintentional, prank calls) or similar situations. Local policy may be inserted here when adopting this document for local use.*

- 3.9.6 False reports.** False or unfounded 9-1-1 calls will be handled in accordance with local policy.

*Comment: Most jurisdictions have enacted legislation providing for criminal penalties for those who abuse the 9-1-1 system. Calls of this type should be documented in accordance with local policy.*

- 3.9.7 Misrouted calls.** Calls may be received at a PSAP that are intended for another PSAP. These calls should be transferred to the other PSAP, if possible, after advising the caller of the transfer. One-button transfer capability, or other enhanced transfer method, for other PSAPs in the home county should be available to the telecommunicator. Calls of this type include Wireless (and wireline) misroutes as well as nomadic VoIP callers. Out of area PSAP contact information may be found in the NENA PSAP Registry or via the NLETS system.

*Comment: Only those PSAPs in the U.S. that are hosted by a law enforcement agency have access to the NLETS system. The county in which the destination PSAP is located must be known in order to use the PSAP Registry. This information is available through the National Association of Counties website (<http://www.naco.org>).*

- 3.9.8 Foreign Language calls.** A foreign language translation service should be available to the telecommunicator to assist in processing foreign language calls. The procedure for contacting that service may be inserted here.

### 3.10 Telecommunicator Discretion

**3.10.1 Discretion.** Telecommunicators should pay close attention to background noise, tone and word choice of the caller as additional evidence to assist with determination of the status of the 9-1-1 call. The time of day and location of the caller may be additional clues to indicate whether a response is necessary. In any situation where the telecommunicator believes an emergency situation may exist, an appropriate public safety response will be initiated based on local policies and procedures.

**3.10.2 Cancellation.** Telecommunicators may disregard a 9-1-1 call if there is evidence that the call is one of the following situations: 9-1-1 Misdialed, Unintentional or Prank Calls.

**3.10.3 Contact.** If contact is made with the caller, telecommunicators will follow call-handling procedures established by the local agency to determine whether a public safety response is necessary.

**3.10.4 Indicated Emergency.** Any evidence of an emergency situation requires that telecommunicators initiate efforts to re-contact the caller to determine the nature of the incident and an accurate location for appropriate public safety response, according to procedures established by the local agency. If attempts to contact the caller are unsuccessful, a field public safety response will be initiated based on the caller's location as indicated by the ALI display.

### 3.11 Incomplete or no data

**3.11.1 ALI Failure.** In the event of a failure to provide a caller location, an attempt to determine the address from which the call originated will be made through reverse look-up, where permitted, or by contacting the telecommunications service provider.

**3.11.1.1** Upon registration with the NeuStar Integrated Voice Response (IVR) Unit, telecommunications service providers for ported or pooled numbers may be identified based on the indicated ANI. For non-ported or pooled numbers, contact information may be obtained by accessing the North American Number Plan database and the NENA Company-ID files. (*See NENA Guidelines for Minimum Response to Wireless 9-1-1 Calls, Document 56-001 Section 7 for additional guidance*)

**3.11.2 ANI failure.** In the event a 9-1-1 call received without an ANI display, the call will be treated as if received on a 7-10 digit emergency line. The telecommunicator will obtain the basic information from the caller. At a minimum, this information should include: the location of the incident, call back number, type of emergency, time frame, hazards, identity of those involved and their location.

**3.11.3 Incorrect or no ALI-ANI information.** If the ANI or ALI information provided is not accurate, based on information provided by the caller, the telecommunicator will complete and forward the appropriate report to effect a correction.

### **3.12 Trouble reports**

**3.12.1 Equipment problems.** All 9-1-1 telephone equipment problems will be reported immediately to the supervisor. A trouble report will be completed and forwarded to the 9-1-1 System Service Provider.

**3.13 Call types.** Protocols for handling the various types of calls (e.g. Police, Fire and EMS) should be established locally and approved by the appropriate authority.

*Comment: Local protocols may be inserted here.*

**3.14 Redundant Calls.** Redundant calls occur when several calls have been received on the same incident. The telecommunicator will make sure that the caller is reporting the same incident and not an unrelated one. Once the telecommunicator is sure that the caller is reporting an incident that has already been received and any additional pertinent information is obtained, the caller will be advised that the call information has already been reported. These calls should be disconnected as soon as possible in order not to tie up any 9-1-1 lines unnecessarily.

## **4 References**

NENA Guidelines for Minimum Response to Wireless 9-1-1 Calls, Document 56-001 (revised November 18, 2004).

## **5 Exhibits**

None