

What number should you call? Should you call at all? Trying to decide whether to call the Sheriff's Department, and if so which number to use, can be confusing. Here are some basic guidelines that you can use to help you appropriately and accurately make that decision.

Emergency vs. Non-Emergency

Here is where you have to use your common sense and best judgement. If you have an *emergency*—you're witnessing a crime-in-progress or any other situation that could potentially result in injury to someone—you should call 911. The following are some examples of when you should call 911:

- "My house is on fire."
- "I think I'm having a heart attack."
- "There's been a traffic accident. People are hurt!"
- "I see someone trying to break into my neighbor's house."
- "I hear someone trying to break into MY house!"
- "Someone with a gun is robbing a store."
- "I see some people beating somebody up."

Suspicious activity, crimes that have already occurred, noise disturbances, etc., are considered *non-emergent*—i.e., there is no immediate threat to someone's life and safety. For these types of calls, use the Sheriff's Department's business lines (for Lancaster Station, (661) 948-8466; for Palmdale Station, (661) 272-2400). The following are some examples of *non-emergent* calls:

- "My car was stolen last night."
- "Someone broke into my house while I was at work."
- "My neighbors down the street are having a loud party; it's 2:00 am and their music is keeping me up!"
- "Someone stole my son's bike at school today."
- "I see someone dumping trash in the desert."
- "I think the house on the corner from me is dealing drugs."

Remember, **ONLY** use 911 to report *emergencies*, not *non-emergent* calls. Never lie or "embellish" details, even just a little, to try to speed up the Sheriff's Department's response.

Things That Might Signal a Crime

The following are some examples of suspicious activity that might indicate a crime about to occur or that has just occurred. Remember, use the Sheriff's Department's business lines to report these sorts of activities.

- Someone going door-to-door down the street and looking into windows or trying doorknobs
- Someone trying the handles of cars parked on the street or looking inside of them
- Someone walking through your neighborhood that appears to have no purpose there
- Vehicles driving slowly through the area, with their lights off or with no apparent destination
- Business transactions being conducted from a vehicle
- A high volume of foot or vehicle traffic to a particular residence, with people staying for only a few minutes at a time
- Someone walking or running while carrying property at an unusual time or place
- Abandoned vehicles, including vehicles that don't appear abandoned but don't belong in your neighborhood, and don't belong to visitors of your neighbors
- Someone running from a car or home
- A stranger sitting in a car for an extended period of time, with no apparent reason
- A stranger stopping to talk to a child

The following are some examples of suspicious activity that might indicate a crime-in-progress. For these sorts of activities, call 911 if you believe that a person has been hurt or is in danger of being hurt; otherwise use the business lines:

- Unusual or suspicious noises that you can't explain, such as breaking glass or loud pounding
- Someone screaming for an unknown reason

- Property being taken out of a closed business or a house with no one home
- A stranger entering a neighbor's seemingly unoccupied home
- A child resisting the advances of an adult
- Someone being forced into a vehicle

Reporting Crime or Suspicious Activity

When you decide to make the call to report a crime or suspicious activity, keep the following in mind:

- Call the appropriate phone number (911 for *emergencies*; business lines for *non-emergencies*).
- Briefly describe the event (“Someone’s breaking into the house next door,” for example). Resist the urge to “tell a story.” The longer it takes for the dispatcher to get the important information from you, the longer it takes to get the call in so that deputies can respond.
- Have the exact address and nearest cross-streets. If you don’t have it and can’t get it, use your address or the cross-streets as a reference (“It’s the blue house next to mine, and I live at....” or “It’s the house with the white picket fence on the corner of....”).
- Tell the dispatcher if the crime is going on now, has already occurred, or you think it might occur.
- Be prepared to give as thorough a description as possible of any suspects, including sex, race, height, weight, approximate age, clothing, hair color/style (shaved head, mohawk, ponytail, etc.), and any distinguishable features you see (facial hair, tattoos, missing teeth, etc.).
- If there is a vehicle involved, be prepared to give a description of that as well, including make, model, style (4-door or 2-door, for example), color, approximate year, license plate and state, and any distinguishing characteristics such as body damage, stickers, special lights or tint, etc.
- If the suspect(s) and/or vehicle leave, tell the dispatcher which direction they went and at what time.

Sometimes a situation changes between the time you report it to the Sheriff’s Department and the

time deputies arrive. If this happens, call back to report the changes, as they might change the deputies’ response priority level.

For example: You called the Sheriff’s Department to report loud noises that sounded like an argument coming from the apartment next door. Five minutes later, deputies have not yet arrived, but now you hear screams, bangs and thumps, and breaking glass coming from the same apartment.

As you can see, in the above example the situation escalated between the time of the initial call and the time deputies arrived. Since now there is reason to believe that someone either has been hurt or is in danger of being hurt, the deputies need the new information to be able to respond appropriately.

“Anonymous Informants”

If you choose to report a crime or suspicious activity, the dispatcher will ask you for your name, address, and call-back phone number. If you do not want to give all or part of this information, you do not have to do so. However, a better option is to ask that deputies not contact you in-person, so that they can still call you to ask any questions that they may need answered to locate the crime or resolve the issue. Remember, deputies are not going to tell someone committing a crime that “so-and-so called us saying you were doing this,” so if that’s what you’re worried about, don’t.

Calling 911 from a Cell Phone

More and more local law enforcement agencies are using an “upgraded” 911 system, in which cell phone 911 calls will go to the nearest police or Sheriff’s station automatically. However, not all phones are compatible with this system, and not all agencies participate. For these callers, the cell phone 911 call goes to one of the CHP dispatch centers in Sacramento or Los Angeles, who then route the call to the appropriate local agency. If you find you are having trouble getting through to 911 on your cell phone, it may be better to call the local agency’s business line.

If you have any questions about reporting crime or suspicious activity, please feel free to contact the Public Safety Office or the Sheriff’s Station to ask.