



**COPS**

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

**Problem-Oriented Guides for Police  
Problem-Specific Guides Series  
No. 19**

# Misuse and Abuse of 911

by  
Rana Sampson





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# Misuse and Abuse of 911

Rana Sampson

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## About the Problem-Specific Guides Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. Neither do they cover all of the technical details about how to implement specific responses. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who:

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (A companion series of *Problem-Solving Tools* guides has been produced to aid in various aspects of problem analysis and assessment.)
  - **Can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.
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- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem. (A companion series of *Response Guides* has been produced to help you understand how commonly-used police responses work on a variety of problems.)
  - **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.
  - **Are willing to work with others to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides.
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They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public bodies including other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, public utilities, community groups, and individual citizens. An effective problem-solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work. Each guide identifies particular individuals or groups in the community with whom police might work to improve the overall response to that problem. Thorough analysis of problems often reveals that individuals and groups other than the police are in a stronger position to address problems and that police ought to shift some greater responsibility to them to do so. Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*, provides further discussion of this topic.

The COPS Office defines community policing as “a policing philosophy that promotes and supports organizational strategies to address the causes and reduce the fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and police-community partnerships.” These guides emphasize problem-solving and police-community partnerships in the context of addressing specific public safety problems. For the most part, the organizational strategies that can facilitate *problem-solving* and *police-community partnerships* vary considerably and discussion of them is beyond the scope of these guides.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming

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increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

Each guide is informed by a thorough review of the research literature and reported police practice and is anonymously peer-reviewed by line police officers, police executives and researchers prior to publication.

The COPS Office and the authors encourage you to provide feedback on this guide and to report on your own agency's experiences dealing with a similar problem. Your agency may have effectively addressed a problem using responses not considered in these guides and your experiences and knowledge could benefit others. This information will be used to update the guides. If you wish to provide feedback and share your experiences it should be sent via e-mail to [cops\\_pubs@usdoj.gov](mailto:cops_pubs@usdoj.gov).

For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at [www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org). This web site offers free online access to:

- the Problem-Specific Guides series
  - the companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools series*
  - instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics
  - an interactive problem-oriented policing training exercise
  - an interactive *Problem Analysis Module*
  - a manual for crime analysts
  - online access to important police research and practices
  - information about problem-oriented policing conferences and award programs.
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## Acknowledgments

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The project team that developed the guide series comprised Herman Goldstein (University of Wisconsin Law School), Ronald V. Clarke (Rutgers University), John E. Eck (University of Cincinnati), Michael S. Scott (University of Wisconsin Law School), Rana Sampson (Police Consultant), and Deborah Lamm Weisel (North Carolina State University).

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Karin Schmerler, Rita Varano and Nancy Leach oversaw the project for the COPS Office and research for the guides was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University by Phyllis Schultze. Suzanne Fregly edited this guide.





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## The Problem of Misuse and Abuse of 911

This guide addresses the problem of misuse and abuse of 911.<sup>§</sup> It begins by describing the problem and its scope. It then identifies a series of questions to help you analyze your local problem, and discusses potential responses to it.

<sup>§</sup> The equivalent U.K. emergency number is 999.

There is little evaluative research on 911 misuse and abuse. The responses suggested are based on sound problem-oriented policing principles, but as new phone technology poses additional challenges, some responses have yet to be tested. Thus, this guide is mainly intended to describe an *urgent problem* and encourage police agencies to analyze and address it.

### Related Problems

Misuse and abuse of 911 shares some similarities with the problems listed below, which require their own analysis and response. This guide does not address these problems:

- multiple 911 calls about the same incident, such as multiple calls about a traffic accident
- false burglar and fire alarm 911 calls (see the *False Burglar Alarms* guide in this series).



§ One reason for using these categories is that some police agencies already do so in classifying 911 misuse and abuse calls. A second reason is that it immediately identifies the purpose for the call; however, one must look further to determine if calls are a misuse or abuse of 911.

## Scope of the Problem

For the purposes of this guide, 911 misuse and abuse is divided into two categories: unintentional and intentional calls. Each category contains different types of 911 misuse and abuse calls, as described below. While there are no national surveys detailing the full extent of 911 misuse and abuse, estimates from various organizations and agencies suggest the problem is widespread in the United States and elsewhere. Some of the particulars regarding the calls may vary depending on local circumstances.

## Unintentional 911 Calls

Unintentional calls occur when a person or phone inadvertently dials 911. This category includes phantom wireless calls, and misdials and hang-up calls.

### Phantom Wireless 911 Calls

Phantom wireless calls are a documented problem in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, although other countries where wireless phones are extensively used probably also experience this problem since wireless systems are similar, despite location. Such calls occur for the following reasons:

- **Automatic dialing:** If a cell phone user inadvertently presses the 9 or 1 key on a phone preprogrammed to dial 911, the phone automatically dials 911, even without the user having to press "send." This often happens when a wireless phone is attached to a belt or in a pocket or purse, and the 9 or 1 is bumped. Most wireless users are unaware that their phones are preprogrammed to dial 911 and retail salespersons do not inform purchasers that their phones are susceptible to unintentional 911 dialing.



- **Redialing or resending:** If, after completing a 911 call, a wireless caller accidentally presses or bumps the "redial" or "send" key, the phone dials 911 again. (Note that landline users may also accidentally redial 911 this way.)
- **Random dialing:** Some older wireless phones dial 911 when the phone's batteries are low.<sup>§</sup>

§ When their batteries are low, some phones start randomly dialing numbers, eventually dialing 911. The call goes through without pressing the "send" button.

The National Emergency Number Association (NENA) reports that phantom wireless calls account for between 25 and 70 percent of all 911 calls in some U.S. communities. The California Highway Patrol (currently the handler of nearly all California wireless 911 calls) estimates that between 1.8 million and 3.6 million of the 6 million wireless 911 calls it receives annually are phantom. U.K. police estimate they receive 11,000 phantom wireless calls per day to their 999 emergency number. The wide data variations highlight the need for further research to pinpoint the scale of the problem.

§§ As wireless carriers move into Enhanced 911, Phase II, 911 centers will be able to locate wireless callers. However, since so many wireless 911 calls are unintentional, implementing Phase II will be a less important lifesaving measure than addressing the current problem of phantom calls, since they prolong the time it takes for dispatchers to respond to other calls.

However, the problem is already serious enough to suggest that ignoring it could have severe ramifications for police and legitimate 911 callers.

Of all the 911 misuse and abuse problems this guide addresses, phantom wireless calls will show the quickest increase, unless addressed. The U.S. 911 system handles 500,000 calls daily, or about 183 million annually.<sup>1</sup> One in four calls are from wireless phones, a tenfold increase since 1991.<sup>2</sup> In the next five years, the number of wireless 911 calls is expected to double from the current 46 million per year<sup>3</sup> to 92 million annually, potentially exacerbating an already significant phantom call problem.<sup>§§</sup>



## 911 Misdials and Hang-Up Calls

§ Such area codes include those for Wilmington, North Carolina (910); Savannah, Georgia (912); Kansas City, Kansas (913); Westchester County, New York (914); El Paso, Texas (915); Sacramento, California (916); some parts of New York City (917); Tulsa, Oklahoma (918); and Raleigh, North Carolina (919).

§§ The Pinellas County 911 coordinator collects data on all 911 calls and tracks year-to-year increases in different types of calls, such as misdials and hang-ups.

Misdials and hang-up calls are another 911 problem. Police suspect that many of these calls occur when callers misdial area codes similar to 911.<sup>§</sup> Others result from misdialing of the international access number—011. In addition, business Centrex and fax users sometimes dial 9 to get an outside line, when their phone systems do not require doing so, if the caller then dials a number starting with 1 and depresses 1 again by accident, the system dials 911 (thus 911 operators sometimes hear fax static on the line). In 2000, the Pinellas County (Florida) Emergency Communications Center received 20,646 misdials, accounting for 4 percent of all its 911 calls.<sup>§§</sup> In Loves Park, Illinois, 3 percent of the 911 calls received in 2000 resulted from area code, international access number and Centrex misdials.

It is suspected that many misdials end up as hang-up calls, once the callers realize their mistake. Agencies that have examined hang-up calls report that a majority are due to caller misdialing (rather than prank calls or hang-ups for other reasons). Many agencies instruct citizens not to hang up if they misdial 911. If a caller hangs up, many agencies conduct callbacks or dispatch officers to determine if a police or medical emergency exists.

The number of 911 *wireless* misdials and hang-ups is impossible to pin down without caller ID, which would allow for callbacks to determine the cause. However, without significant improvements, wireless caller location information will tax the resources of many 911 centers, unless the phantom call problem is resolved.

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## Intentional 911 Calls

Callers sometimes deliberately, but inappropriately, dial 911. Such intentional calls fall under several distinct categories.

### Nonemergency 911 Calls

Nonemergency calls often constitute a large portion of all 911 calls.<sup>§</sup> Callers sometimes phone about an incident—albeit not an emergency—that requires police attention (e.g., the caller's car was broken into the previous night, or the caller has been involved in a noninjury vehicle accident). Others call 911 to ask about non-police-related matters (e.g., the time of a football game, the directions to a local event, the exact time of day, or the time of garbage pick-ups). In addition, because wireless carriers do not charge for 911 calls, cell phone users sometimes call 911 and ask the dispatcher to transfer their call to a non-police number, to avoid paying for it. At least one police agency found that it was their own off-duty personnel who abused 911 in this way.

§ For example, in 2000, 40 percent of the 911 calls in Jefferson County, Kentucky, were nonemergencies (Tanganon 2000). In Floyd County, Indiana, nearly half the monthly 911 calls are nonemergencies (Tanganon 2000). In 2001, the San Diego Sheriff's Department reported that more than half of its 911 calls were frivolous (Ma 2001).

§§ Some students use this tactic to avoid and postpone an academic test for which they are unprepared. For some of the same reasons, students sometimes pull school fire alarms.

### Prank 911 Calls

People sometimes call 911 to falsely claim an emergency or to deliberately hang up. Most agencies do not keep separate totals on the number of prank calls, so it is unclear how significant a problem this is in the United States. Some of these calls are referred to, in policing circles, as children "playing on the phone." These calls generally come from private homes or pay phones—particularly pay phones easily accessible to teens and children (such as in or near malls, bowling alleys, or schools). In some of the more extreme cases, students falsely claim to have planted a bomb in a school. Doing so is a quick way to anonymously force the immediate evacuation of the school and cessation of classes.<sup>§§</sup>



A subcategory of prank calls is *diversionary calls*. A caller dials 911 to send the police to a location where no emergency has occurred, diverting them away from the caller's criminal activity. During the 1990s, when open-air drug markets were at a peak in the United States, officers frequently noted such calls and their suspicions that drug dealers were behind them. There are only a few ways to determine if a call is diversionary: if the caller admits it; if someone informs on the caller; or if the dispatcher or police compare the caller's location with that of the alleged emergency, to determine if the caller could plausibly claim an emergency at the called in location.

The difference between "playing on the phone" calls and diversionary calls lies in the motives behind them. Those who "play on the phone" (but do not immediately hang up) typically want to *see* the police respond, so they are unlikely to send the police to an area not visible to them. Diversionary callers want the opposite result. (Examples of police responses to both types of calls are provided later in this guide.)

### Exaggerated Emergency 911 Calls

Sometimes 911 callers intentionally exaggerate the seriousness of an emergency to get a quicker police response (although it is unclear how extensive this problem is). For example, a caller may falsely report "shots fired" when calling about a dispute or assault. Such 911 misuse is difficult to prove because the caller might simply claim, for instance, that he or she heard shots but did not actually see a gun fired. In other words, the caller knows there is enough room for "caller error" that he or she cannot be charged (or prosecuted) for the exaggerated 911 call.



## Lonely Complainant 911 Calls

Some 911 callers, over a series of months or years, repeatedly report an emergency, yet the police never find any evidence of one. The calls are not pranks, and they do not neatly fit into the exaggerated emergency category. They are typically made by the live-alone elderly or mentally ill. Some callers suffer from delusions, actually believing an emergency is occurring; others are often simply seeking company, perhaps not realizing the public expense of their calls and the accident-injury risks involved in officers responding to high priority dispatch calls. The fact that these callers commonly claim an intruder is in their yard or house perhaps suggests a rational manipulation of 911 and of police services.





## Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of 911 misuse and abuse. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Carefully analyzing your problem will help you design a more effective response strategy.

### Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular 911 misuse and abuse problem, even if the answers are not always readily available. To accurately assess the magnitude of the problem, you may find that you must refine how your dispatch center records certain call types. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

#### Incidents

- Which specific nature codes<sup>§</sup> identify 911 misuse and abuse?
- What percentage of 911 calls are wireless? What percentage of wireless calls are phantom?
- What percentage of calls are misdials? What percentage of misdials are from private homes? From fax machines?
- What percentage of calls are hang-ups? What percentage of hang-ups are from private homes? From pay phones? Do dispatcher callbacks to home and pay phones illuminate a pattern as to the cause of the hang-ups?<sup>§§</sup> What percentage of hang-ups are actual emergencies?
- What percentage of calls are nonemergencies, including transfer call requests?
- What percentage of calls are pranks, such as false bomb threats or those that clearly involve children "playing on the phone"? To what extent are such calls a problem? Are there any indications that diversionary calls are a problem? If so, are there any patterns to those calls?

§ Police communications centers use nature codes to classify incoming 911 calls.

§§ The Loves Park 911 center determined, through analysis, that an increase in landline hang-ups between 1993 and 1994 was due to their phone company's switching all city calls, other than those to 911, from analogue to digital. (With analogue calls, there is a pause before the phone rings.) Many 911 callers, now accustomed to hearing an immediate ring, were assuming the pause meant their call did not go through, and were hanging up before a 911 operator answered. The 911 center's supervisor asked the phone company to replace the pause with a false ring, and 911 hang-ups subsequently dropped to previous levels.



- What percentage of "shots fired" calls are downgraded to assaults without a firearm once police investigate? Are there any patterns of other exaggerated emergency calls?
- Are there any patterns of lonely complainant calls? If so, to what extent are such calls a problem?

### Impact on 911 Resources

- What percentage of your 911 resources are annually consumed with calls that qualify as misuse and abuse?
- How long does it take 911 personnel to determine if a call is phantom? A landline misdial?
- Do phantom and nonemergency calls delay response to other emergencies? If so, by how long?
- What is the current total cost to your 911 center and/or police department for handling phantom wireless calls, misdials and hang-up calls, nonemergency calls, prank calls, exaggerated emergency calls, and lonely complainant calls?

### Offenders

- Which wireless phone brands and models account for automatic dialing of 911? For random dialing?
- Which businesses and what types of fax machines account for fax calls to 911?
- What percentage of misdials and hang-ups are by adults? Teens and children?

### Locations/Times

- Do certain locations account for higher percentages of 911 hang-up and prank calls (e.g., malls, bowling alleys, schools, common routes to schools, skating rinks, convenience stores pay phone banks, or casinos with indoor or nearby pay phones)?
  - Who owns the phones at these locations? Do the owners adequately monitor the phones?
  - Do hang-up calls cluster around certain times (e.g., times when children are released from school, times of year)?
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- Do nonemergency calls cluster around certain times of day? Days of week? Times of year (e.g., the football season or over the holidays)?

### Current Responses

- How does your 911 center monitor 911 misuse and abuse? Are responses measured for their effectiveness in reducing it?
- What local and state laws govern 911 misuse and abuse? Are they adequate? Do they address each aspect of the problem? Are they *used* to address the problem, and if so, have they reduced it?<sup>§</sup>
- Are the wireless phone manufacturers in your area aware of and concerned about phantom calls?
- Does your jurisdiction advise citizens to stay on the line if they misdial 911?<sup>§§</sup>
- If you receive lonely complainant calls, what efforts have you made to stop them?
- What repercussions, if any, apply to callers who exaggerate an emergency?

§ Many local and state laws that address 911 misuse and abuse may require revision to cover all aspects of the problem.

§§ In 2003, the Farmingham (Massachusetts) Police Department's web site contained the message: "If you dial 911 by accident, do not hang up the phone, all hang-ups on 911 must have police and or fire dispatched to the location to check on the call. Accidents happen, stay on and tell the operator it was an error."

### Measuring Your Effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. (For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers*.)



The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to 911 misuse and abuse:

- reduced number of phantom wireless calls
- reduced number of phantom calls from wireless phones previously susceptible to them
- reduced number of misdials and hang-up calls
- increased rate of phantom and hang-up calls that are actual emergencies
- reduced number of prank calls
- reduced number of exaggerated emergency calls
- reduced number of lonely complainant calls
- reduced amount of time, on average, it takes for dispatchers to answer calls
- reduced number of personnel hours spent handling misuse and abuse calls
- reduced misuse and abuse call rates for various types of premises—private homes, malls, bowling alleys, schools, convenience stores, etc.
- reduced incidence of misuse and abuse calls at certain times, such as during rush hour, after school lets out, over the holidays, and during summer months
- reduced overall number of misuse and abuse calls.



## **Responses to the Problem of Misuse and Abuse of 911**

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

There is no nationally recognized protocol to address 911 misuse and abuse. Rather, there is a patchwork of federal, local and private responses. They are detailed below, along with other suggested responses, to provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. Some forms of the problem—such as phantom wireless calls—must be addressed at the federal level, but this will occur only if local agencies combine their efforts to highlight the extent of the problem. Conversely, landline 911 problems are best addressed at the local level. It is critical that you tailor these responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Police responses alone are seldom effective in sufficiently reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do; give careful consideration to who else in your community shares responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it.

### **Responses to Phantom Wireless 911 Calls**

#### **1. Requiring manufacturers to redesign wireless phones.**

On June 9, 1999, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which regulates the wireless industry, requested that manufacturers redesign their wireless phones to address the phantom call problem.<sup>4</sup> However, most manufacturers do not appear to have heeded this request. The FCC advised

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§ For example, see the Stop Accidental Calls web site at [www.StopAccidentalCalls.com](http://www.StopAccidentalCalls.com).

manufacturers that, if necessary, it would adopt specific rules to reduce phantom calls. The FCC, upon petition, could consider adopting a mandatory order.

**2. Recalling preprogrammed wireless phones.** While an FCC order would address all future wireless manufacturing, a recall would resolve the issue of the millions of phones that currently cause phantom calls. Product recall could be narrowly tailored to those models responsible, although manufacturers should have the burden of determining whether their phones cause the problem. Either the manufacturers or the FCC could prompt the recall.

**3. Underwriting and distributing phone button guards.** Private entrepreneurs, recognizing the problem of phantom wireless calls, have developed button guards to reduce the accidental pressing of the 9 or 1 key, which causes certain phones to speed dial 911.<sup>§</sup> Button guards also protect the redial key if 911 was the last number dialed. While this is less desirable than product recall, wireless manufacturers may find it a less costly alternative for addressing phones currently in circulation.

**4. Prohibiting automatic 911 dialing.** This approach should be tailored to ban wireless manufacturers from preprogramming phones. Several states and parts of Canada prohibit automatic 911 dialing. However, the laws have not been used to change phone manufacturers' autodialing programming practices.<sup>5</sup> Enacting a federal law could be politically difficult, but it would be the most efficient way to address the problem; an FCC order could accomplish this, as well. Those states that already have legislation banning landline automatic dialing of 911 could revise their laws to also include a specific ban on the preprogramming of wireless units. While there are some advantages for individual users to have 911 pre-programmed, the burden of and delay caused by phantom calls on the 911 system outweighs the benefits.

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In Loves Park, if someone unintentionally speed dials 911, the operator tells the caller that he or she could be prosecuted for doing so, since 911 speed dialing is prohibited there.

§ Telecommunications devices for the deaf, commonly referred to as TTY, send out certain tones that 911 center computers recognize, allowing for written responses. However, these devices cannot be used with wireless phones.

**5. Funneling phantom wireless calls through an automated 911-answering system.** In January 2001, the California Highway Patrol piloted a trial method for reducing phantom wireless calls in the Golden Gate area. During peak 911 calling times, if dispatchers determined no one was on the line, they switched the call to a separate queue, and an automated attendant asked the caller to press any number (or to say yes) if an emergency existed. If the caller did not press a number or say yes after the message played twice, the call was terminated.

During the five-week trial, the average waiting time for a dispatcher to answer a 911 call dropped from 93 seconds to eight seconds. However, lawyers for one of the wireless carriers objected, suggesting they might sue, and representatives of the deaf community asserted that the system was not friendly to the community's needs.<sup>5</sup> The Highway Patrol ultimately abandoned the project.

The United Kingdom has instituted a similar initiative, dubbed "Silent Solution." Cellular calls are answered with an automated message: "If you require any of the emergency services, press 5 on your keypad two times now." If the caller does not do so, the recording resumes: "Nothing has been heard. Operator, please release the line." If the caller presses 55, the automated attendant immediately reroutes the call to the police on the highest-priority line, and it is the next to be answered.<sup>6</sup> Using this system, U.K. emergency



communications officials discovered that of the more than 14,000 cellular calls to 999 per day, only about 25 are true emergencies.

If wireless carriers remain unresponsive to the FCC's request, and to police requests for reform, police agencies could use a funneled phantom call system. This approach requires some refinement to address the deaf community's needs. In addition, it would be wise (although difficult) to prenotify the area's wireless users about the system. There is a slight risk that a wireless caller in a life-threatening situation—such as someone being attacked—could not respond, and the call would be terminated. However, this risk also exists when no one responds to a 911 hang-up from a pay phone call, and a number of police agencies no longer dispatch officers to such calls.

## **Responses to Phantom Wireless 911 Calls With Limited Effectiveness**

### **6. Dispatching officers to all phantom wireless calls.**

Many 911 centers try to determine if a phantom wireless call is truly an emergency. In most cases, no one is on the line. In other cases, the operator can hear someone talking to someone nearby. By listening to the conversation, the operator can determine whether the call was intentional. If it remains unclear whether the call is an emergency, many departments attempt callbacks using caller ID. If they cannot determine the caller's number, and there is any indication that an emergency exists, some 911 centers contact the caller's phone carrier to request a callback number. However, some phone carriers will not provide a number without a warrant. With the commencement of Enhanced 911, Phase II, 911 centers will have to determine whether they will dispatch to phantom call locations. If they adopt this approach, the drain on police

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resources could be enormous. For instance, the California Highway Patrol estimates it would potentially need twice its current number of officers to respond to the 1.8 million to 3.6 million phantom calls it receives annually.

**7. Requesting that wireless carriers address phantom calls.** In December 2001, the National Emergency Number Association notified 21 wireless carriers that they should correct the phantom call problem, and forwarded a copy of the notification letter to the FCC. The association requested that carriers direct their phone manufacturers to remove or neutralize the 911 autodial feature "as quickly as possible." It also requested that wireless carriers direct retailers to turn 911 autodial programs off, issue public service warnings and fliers to alert phone owners about the phantom calls resulting from the 911 autodial pre-programming, and itemize all 911 calls in customer billing statements.<sup>7</sup>

Several years ago, officials from the California Highway Patrol and the Reno (Nevada) Police Department separately met with carriers whose phones made phantom calls. Several carriers changed their handset designs. Some agreed to stop preprogramming their phones to autodial 911; however, many have not done so. The Highway Patrol had greater success than the Reno police. Only one carrier agreed to meet with Reno officials to discuss the issue, and that carrier did not have the largest share of Reno's wireless market. Handset manufacturers rejected the idea of a product recall, and phone owners can still program their phones to autodial 911. The yearly increase in wireless users, coupled with the use of older phones that make phantom calls, has offset any gains achieved by the few manufacturers who no longer preprogram phones. A more coordinated effort involving national police organizations and the FCC may be needed to effectively address the problem.

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## Responses to 911 Misdials and Hang-Up Calls

§ Putting 911 on speed dial increases the risk of misdials due to accidental pressing of the button.

§§ Some people mistakenly dial 911 instead of 011 (the international access code) when phoning someone in a foreign country.

§§§ Several years ago, a police agency employed a clown to visit elementary schools to teach children how to use 911 correctly. Thereafter, some children called 911 to speak to the clown.

§§§§ For more information about Pinellas County 911 and the public educator's role, contact [ed911@aol.com](mailto:ed911@aol.com).

**8. Educating the public.** Public education could reduce 911 misdials and hang-up calls. For misdials of the international access number and area codes similar to 911, police could tailor efforts to specific populations. For instance, if elderly citizens using landlines are responsible for a majority of misdials, police could encourage them to put commonly called numbers—but not 911—on speed dial.<sup>§</sup> As another example, police might persuade pay phone companies in areas with large immigrant populations to put stickers that list the international access number on their phones.<sup>§§</sup> If callers are hanging up after misdialing 911 (causing operators to needlessly make callbacks and dispatch officers), then stressing the importance of staying on the line to the public would be valuable. A frequent shortcoming of public information campaigns is the initiating agency's failure to determine whether the effort actually reduced calls in the targeted category (area code misdials, pay phone hang-ups, etc.). Without measurement, it will be unclear if the initiative actually worked.<sup>§§§</sup> While public education efforts may prove worthwhile if tailored to specific offending populations, if problems recur, more refined efforts may be required.

Pinellas County employs a 911 public educator to address the misuse and abuse problems arising from its more than 500,000 annual 911 calls. Misdials and hang-ups accounted for over 10 percent of all 911 calls. The educator found, from a study in one of the county's cities, that children were responsible for only 10 percent of the misdials and hang-up calls, so efforts were geared toward adults. The initiative reduced the average annual number of misdials and hang-up calls by more than 12,000 over a three-year period.<sup>§§§§</sup>



**9. Dispatching officers to landline hang-up calls only when there is evidence of an emergency.** Many, but not all, 911 centers call landline hang-up numbers back (if their system can provide the numbers). If the operator is unsatisfied with the reason given for the hang-up, the line is open or no one answers, the operator usually dispatches an officer. If the line is open, 911 centers often dispatch medical personnel and, sometimes, fire personnel as well. If the line is busy, some 911 centers, such as that in Hopkins County, Kentucky, contact the local telephone operator to determine if there is a conversation on the line. If so, dispatchers do not send out an officer, reasoning that a conversation indicates the caller probably dialed 911 by accident.<sup>8</sup> Some agencies, such as the South San Francisco Police Department, check the call history for the address to determine if there have been previous 911 hang-ups.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, operators can determine that "playing on the phone" caused the call. Upon learning this, a handful of police agencies send a 911 information packet to the home, including a warning that there will be a fine for any subsequent false calls.<sup>10</sup> In the vast majority of cases, no emergency call was intended. Limiting dispatch to only those locations where there is evidence of an emergency minimizes the number of unfounded calls that police must handle. If police dispatch to a home where there is no evidence of an emergency, and entry is refused, there may not be probable cause to enter the home without a warrant; a refusal alone is probably insufficient to establish probable cause for entering. Police agencies should check with their legal advisor regarding this issue, to help refine dispatch policies.



## Responses to 911 Hang-Up Calls With Limited Effectiveness

**10. Dispatching officers to all landline hang-up calls.** A handful of 911 centers treat all hang-up calls as emergencies requiring immediate investigation. Operators do not call back, in case a criminal answers the phone. Instead, they immediately dispatch police in hopes of catching a criminal by surprise.<sup>11</sup> In the vast majority of cases, police find that no crime has occurred.

**11. Providing no response to pay phone hang-up calls.** Because so many 911 pay phone hang-up calls are unfounded, some police agencies, including the Reno Police Department, do not dispatch officers to the locations unless there is evidence of trouble (such as screaming). Instead, they send out a general alert to officers in the field. While this approach frees officers for true emergencies, it does not fully address the underlying causes for the hang-ups.

## Responses to Nonemergency 911 Calls

**12. Implementing 311 systems.** Some cities, overburdened with nonemergency 911 calls, adopt 311 systems to address this problem. Over the past five years, cities such as Baltimore, with assistance from the federal government, have adopted such systems to divert and handle nonemergency calls.<sup>12</sup> Such systems may also reduce the number of abandoned calls from callers failing to wait for a 911 operator to answer, since they can shorten call pick-up times.



**13. Educating the public via 911 educators or coordinators.** As an alternative to adopting a 311 system, some jurisdictions, such as Pinellas County, hire a public educator or coordinator to teach the public about the correct—emergency-only—use of 911. This approach does not require additional dispatchers and equipment, as the 311 systems do, so for many jurisdictions, it is an affordable alternative.

§ In Marion County, Missouri, first-time violators receive a letter describing the call, as well as information on what constitutes a true emergency. Second-time violators are informed that they will face prosecution if another false or nonemergency call occurs; the county's prosecuting attorney has agreed to follow through in such cases.

## Responses to Prank 911 Calls

**14. Targeting violators and applying graduated sanctions.** Police can send information packets to first-time 911 abusers, as they do in Wakefield, Massachusetts,<sup>13</sup> but if calls persist, a system of graduated sanctions, such as fines, could be of value. In many communities, making false or harassing 911 calls is a prosecutable offense, punishable with a fine or jail time. For callers who repeatedly dial 911 (without a good reason), or parents whose children repeatedly call 911 while "playing on the phone," civil fines are more appropriate than criminal sanctions, since most prosecutors will neither prosecute nor seek jail time for the offenses. Generally, prosecutors file on 911 offenses in only the most egregious cases unless a different arrangement is agreed upon between the police and the prosecutor. § A number of 911 centers provide public education programs or public service announcements to reduce 911 misuse and abuse, such as hang-up calls from children "playing on the phone." For instance, in Franklin County, Ohio, a public service announcement made clear to children that with the advent of E911 "we know where you are" when you call 911; prank calls declined as a result. Police can also target specific phones from which prank calls are made.



In 1994, San Diego Police Officers Patti Clayton, Bob Smith and Miguel Flores, and Sergeants David Contreras and Rudy Tai, noticed that a high volume of 911 hang-up calls were coming from pay phones in the 700 block of East San Ysidro Boulevard, in the city's Southern Division. This area abuts Mexico and has the busiest border crossing in the world—more than 70,000 vehicles and pedestrians cross during an average day. Due to this heavy border traffic, officers were sometimes spending over an hour responding to the calls, invariably finding no reason for them.

Officer Clayton surveilled the 20 pay phones on the block, phones belonging to six different owners. She also spoke with community members, taxi and bus drivers, and business owners, and determined three main causes for the hang-ups:

- 1. Diversionary calls.** Unlicensed taxi drivers, called "wildcatters," were calling 911 from the phones and hanging up to divert police away from their passenger pick-up points, several blocks away at the border. Drug dealers were also making diversionary 911 calls from the phones.
- 2. Prank calls.** Late-night revelers returning to the United States from Mexico were calling 911 and hanging up as they passed by the phones.
- 3. Misdials of the international access number.** Upon arriving in the United States, some Mexican travelers, using the phones to call their families, were misdialing 911 instead of dialing 011, the international access number.

The police team met with business owners, alerting them to the severity of the problem. The owners, realizing that police were being diverted from crime-ridden areas to respond to the false calls, agreed to remove 10 of the phones and to relocate several others. Officer Clayton installed signs above the phones that read, "It is a crime to dial 911 to make a false police report." With the owners' consent, she also posted "no loitering" signs next to the phones. The sign messages are in both English and Spanish.

To address Mexican travelers' misdialing, the team asked the phone manufacturer to install differently shaped 9 keys in the phones, but this proved cost-prohibitive. As an alternative, Officer Clayton painted all the 9 keys red, and repainted them weekly to make up for wear and tear.

As a result of the team's efforts, the number of 911 calls from the phones dropped by 50 percent. The initiative also resulted in lower response times to other calls.



**15. Applying crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) to hot-spot pay phones.** Different pay phones—for different reasons—become hot spots for false 911 calls. After reviewing *at least* six months' worth of pay-phone call data for trends, 911 centers should give officers a list of false-call hot spots for follow-up analysis. In designing place-specific responses, officers should consider using CPTED principles, including increasing natural surveillance and limiting or monitoring access. CPTED measures such as relocating phones to improve an owner's ability to monitor them, trimming obstructing trees and shrubbery, and removing obstacles such as dumpsters, barriers and benches can prove effective.

§ The convenience store owner initially had the phones placed on the property's perimeter, rather than near the store's entrance, to discourage loitering. However, the phones' remoteness, along with the obstructing foliage, prevented the staff from monitoring them.

By analyzing 911 hot-spot data, St. Petersburg, Florida police Sergeant Charles Burnette determined that pay phones near a convenience store had accounted for 71 hang-up or "playing on the phone" calls over a five-year period. The call times coincided with the time students were released from school. Sergeant Burnette noted that foliage blocked natural surveillance of the phones, and that the phones were unlit, compounding the problem. He met with store management, who agreed to monitor the phones,<sup>§</sup> and asked city staff to trim the obstructing foliage and install lights by the phones. As a result of this initiative, the false calls stopped.

Sergeant Burnette reviewed other pay phone hot-spots and during his analysis discovered that five percent of *all* of St. Petersburg's 911 calls were either hang-up or "playing on the phone" calls. Pay phone calls appeared to account for some of the problem. Because the calls did not cluster solely around student release times, Sergeant Burnette surmised that adults were also responsible. He recommended CPTED surveys of pay phones and proposed an ordinance that would have required that pay phones meet CPTED standards, including posting a warning on the pay phone about the penalties for 911 misuse. The ordinance was not enacted, however.



**16. Having property overseers monitor hot-spot pay phones.** In some jurisdictions, 911 centers ask property overseers to check whether pay phone calls are true emergencies. For example, the Loves Park 911 supervisor found a pattern of repeat hang-up calls from pay phones in the city's malls, bowling alleys, and schools. Now, if 911 dispatchers receive a hang-up call from one of these locations, they will not dispatch officers unless they have received confirmation of an emergency from mall security, bowling alley management or school administrators. If kids are "playing on the phone," the property overseers notify the police, who then respond to arrest the youth. Twelve percent of all 911 hang-up calls there are now handled this way. If particular pay phones are hot spots for hang-up or diversionary calls, police should determine who owns the phones (and who manages the property), and request their oversight in preventing the problem.

### **Response to Exaggerated Emergency 911 Calls**

**17. Targeting education to the people responsible.** It is worthwhile for 911 centers to identify people who make exaggerated emergency calls, and to inform them about the associated costs and hazards. People who live or work in areas with particularly severe crime problems, such as open-air drug or prostitution markets, sometimes make such calls out of fear and frustration, believing that a quick police response is essential. Rather than educating these callers individually, it may be more economical to do so in a group format (perhaps in a block meeting). Police should come prepared with alternative ways to address the problem(s) prompting the original 911 calls. In addition, police should monitor any future calls from the targeted group to determine if education efforts have resolved the matter, or if more coercive remedies, such as fines or other sanctions, are necessary.

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## **Response to Lonely Complainant 911 Calls**

**18. Arranging for suitable company for the callers.** In many cases involving lonely complainants, the caller is not a danger to him- or herself or to others, and thus fails to qualify for emergency mental health services. Less coercive measures are more appropriate in such situations. Time-consuming though it may be, if calls are frequent, arranging for professionals such as mental health or social service workers to assess callers and their circumstances will serve police interests. In some cases, informing the caller's family members about the problem may lead to increased monitoring of the caller's behavior. Alternatively, representatives from social service, charitable or faith-based organizations might agree to regularly visit the caller. Ultimately, however, constant 911 calls about imagined emergencies or fabricated ones (as a means of securing company) may indicate that the caller should no longer live alone, and may find more comfort in an assisted living facility.





## Appendix: Summary of Responses to Misuse and Abuse of 911

The table below summarizes the responses to misuse and abuse of 911, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>Responses to Phantom Wireless 911 Calls</i>					
1.	13	Requiring manufacturers to redesign wireless phones	Makes phones less susceptible to phantom calls	...police agencies, police chief and sheriff organizations, NENA, and other interested parties collaborate to petition the FCC using accurate, recent data	Financial costs to the wireless industry may be significant
2.	14	Recalling preprogrammed wireless phones	Addresses phones already on the market	...narrowly tailored to those phone makes and models causing the problem	Financial costs to the wireless industry may be significant
3.	14	Underwriting and distributing phone button guards	Prevents unintentional speed dialing and redialing of 911	...wireless manufacturers pay for and distribute the guards, encourage wireless owners to use them, and provide a public assessment of their effectiveness in reducing the problem	Financial costs to the wireless industry may be significant



<b>Response No.</b>	<b>Page No.</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>How It Works</b>	<b>Works Best If...</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
4.	14	Prohibiting automatic 911 dialing	Federal law would prohibit the preprogramming of phones to autodial 911; state law would prohibit the use of 911 autodial	...federal law targets manufacturers, not phone owners; and state law targets owners, allowing for graduated sanctions against repeat violators	If there is resistance to a federal law, an FCC order may serve the purpose; police chiefs in each state may need to collaborate to ensure that state laws are enacted; police may find it difficult to persuade certain groups (such as the elderly) not to use 911 autodial
5.	15	Funneling phantom wireless calls through an automated 911-answering system	Allows dispatchers to more quickly respond to calls	...the FCC supports this approach	May require refinement so as not to adversely affect the deaf; may also require some targeted public education; if wireless manufacturers support this approach over others more costly to them, they should bear the cost of informing customers about how it works, and release the police from liability for using it



Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
<i>Responses to Phantom 911 Wireless Calls With Limited Effectiveness</i>					
6.	16	Dispatching officers to all phantom wireless calls	Officers respond to all identifiable phantom call locations	...the police agency has a low call load	Reduces the time officers have to address verifiable crime and safety problems; once Enhanced 911, Phase II, is fully implemented, the number of identifiable phantom call locations will increase, as will the number of unwarranted dispatches
7.	17	Requesting that wireless carriers address phantom calls	Police and other organizations ask wireless carriers to voluntarily address the problem	...the organizations requesting the voluntary compliance notify the FCC that they have done so	Collaborative efforts may be difficult and take time, and voluntary requests have, thus far, proven ineffective
<i>Responses to 911 Misdials and Hang-up Calls</i>					
8.	18	Educating the public	Encourages people to dial carefully and to stay on the line if they accidentally call 911	...911 centers track causes of misdials and hang-ups	General campaigns—as opposed to narrowly tailored ones—are unlikely to correct the problem of misdials; education efforts should be customized, then assessed for effectiveness



<b>Response No.</b>	<b>Page No.</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>How It Works</b>	<b>Works Best If...</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
9.	19	Dispatching officers to landline hang-up calls only when there is evidence of an emergency	Reduces the number of unfounded calls that police must handle	...911 centers follow up on hang-ups by sending callers information packets, and graduated sanctions apply to repeat violators	Informing the public about the extent to which hang-up calls drain police resources may help police avoid political fallout for responding only when there is evidence of an emergency; it may help to let citizens know that many police departments now make callbacks, a more efficient and effective practice than automatically responding to hang-ups
<i>Responses to 911 Hang-Up Calls With Limited Effectiveness</i>					
10.	20	Dispatching officers to all landline hang-up calls	Gives police the opportunity to catch criminals by surprise, since operators do not call numbers back before dispatching them	...a large number of hang-up calls are made by people phoning police to alert them to a crime in progress; however, this is not the case	Most landline hang-up calls can be resolved without dispatching officers
11.	20	Providing no response to pay phone hang-up calls	Dispatchers issue a general alert to officers in the field, but do not dispatch them to the scene unless there is evidence of an emergency	...property overseers monitor pay phones	Requires property overseers' cooperation



<b>Response No.</b>	<b>Page No.</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>How It Works</b>	<b>Works Best If...</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<i>Responses to Nonemergency 911 Calls</i>					
12.	20	Implementing 311 systems	Reduces demands on 911 systems; reduces caller frustration	...adequate funds are available for 311 technology and staffing	Start-up and maintenance costs may be significant
13.	21	Educating the public via 911 educators or coordinators	Teaches citizens to use 911 appropriately	...educational initiatives address each aspect of 911 misuse and abuse	Less costly than implementing 311 systems
<i>Responses to Prank 911 Calls</i>					
14.	21	Targeting violators and applying graduated sanctions	Persuades callers to use 911 appropriately	...efforts are specifically tailored to problem people and phones, rather than overly broad	Civil sanctions require a system for collecting fines; fines could be used to support additional 911 educational efforts
15.	23	Applying crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) to hot-spot pay phones	Decreases the potential for prank 911 calls from these phones	...officers are trained in CPTED principles and techniques	Some phones may need to be relocated (or removed), which can have financial implications for the owners
16.	24	Having property overseers monitor hot-spot pay phones	Shifts responsibility for monitoring phones to those who are better able to do so	...police have carefully analyzed the problem at hot-spot locations and are willing to educate property overseers	Some places, such as schools, may not have enough staff to monitor phones, and may resist phone relocation unless convinced of the seriousness of the problem



<b>Response No.</b>	<b>Page No.</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>How It Works</b>	<b>Works Best If...</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<i>Response to Exaggerated Emergency 911 Calls</i>					
17.	24	Targeting education to the people responsible	Persuades citizens to use 911 appropriately; police acknowledge and address the underlying concerns that prompt the original 911 calls	...911 centers can identify specific blocks making the calls	Requires 911 centers to identify calls that initially receive a priority response, but are subsequently downgraded in priority once police arrive and assess the situation
<i>Response to Lonely Complainant 911 Calls</i>					
18.	25	Arranging for suitable company for the callers	Reduces callers' motivations to call 911 inappropriately	...family members or suitable local services are available	Callers may resist assistance; may be time-consuming to ensure appropriate measures are taken



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Dunsworth (2000).
  - <sup>2</sup> National Emergency Number Association (2001).
  - <sup>3</sup> National Emergency Number Association (2001).
  - <sup>4</sup> Federal Communications Commission (1999).
  - <sup>5</sup> Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency Service (2002).
  - <sup>6</sup> London Metropolitan Police (2001).
  - <sup>7</sup> Hixson (2001).
  - <sup>8</sup> Larson (1998).
  - <sup>9</sup> Larson (1998).
  - <sup>10</sup> Hannibal Courier-Post (1997).
  - <sup>11</sup> Larson (1998).
  - <sup>12</sup> Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (2000).
  - <sup>13</sup> Wakefield Police Department (1992).
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## About the Author

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Rana Sampson is a national problem-oriented policing consultant and the former director of public safety for the University of San Diego. She was previously a White House Fellow; National Institute of Justice Fellow; senior researcher and trainer at the Police Executive Research Forum; attorney; and patrol officer, undercover narcotics officer and patrol sergeant with the New York City Police Department, where she was awarded several commendations of merit and won the National Improvement of Justice Award. She is the coauthor (with Michael Scott) of *Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems: Case Studies in Problem-Solving*, which documents high-quality crime control efforts from around the United States, Canada and Europe. She is a judge for the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing, a former judge for the police Fulbright awards, and a commissioner with California's Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training. Sampson holds a law degree from Harvard and a bachelor's degree from Barnard College, Columbia University.





## Recommended Readings

- **A Police Guide to Surveying Citizens and Their Environments**, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1993. This guide offers a practical introduction for police practitioners to two types of surveys that police find useful: surveying public opinion and surveying the physical environment. It provides guidance on whether and how to conduct cost-effective surveys.
- **Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers**, by John E. Eck (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001). This guide is a companion to the *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* series. It provides basic guidance to measuring and assessing problem-oriented policing efforts.
- **Conducting Community Surveys**, by Deborah Weisel (Bureau of Justice Statistics and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1999). This guide, along with accompanying computer software, provides practical, basic pointers for police in conducting community surveys. The document is also available at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs).
- **Crime Prevention Studies**, edited by Ronald V. Clarke (Criminal Justice Press, 1993, et seq.). This is a series of volumes of applied and theoretical research on reducing opportunities for crime. Many chapters are evaluations of initiatives to reduce specific crime and disorder problems.



- **Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing: The 1999 Herman Goldstein Award Winners.** This document produced by the National Institute of Justice in collaboration with the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Police Executive Research Forum provides detailed reports of the best submissions to the annual award program that recognizes exemplary problem-oriented responses to various community problems. A similar publication is available for the award winners from subsequent years. The documents are also available at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij).
  - **Not Rocket Science? Problem-Solving and Crime Reduction,** by Tim Read and Nick Tilley (Home Office Crime Reduction Research Series, 2000). Identifies and describes the factors that make problem-solving effective or ineffective as it is being practiced in police forces in England and Wales.
  - **Opportunity Makes the Thief: Practical Theory for Crime Prevention,** by Marcus Felson and Ronald V. Clarke (Home Office Police Research Series, Paper No. 98, 1998). Explains how crime theories such as routine activity theory, rational choice theory and crime pattern theory have practical implications for the police in their efforts to prevent crime.
  - **Problem Analysis in Policing,** by Rachel Boba (Police Foundation, 2003). Introduces and defines problem analysis and provides guidance on how problem analysis can be integrated and institutionalized into modern policing practices.
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- **Problem-Oriented Policing**, by Herman Goldstein (McGraw-Hill, 1990, and Temple University Press, 1990). Explains the principles and methods of problem-oriented policing, provides examples of it in practice, and discusses how a police agency can implement the concept.
  - **Problem-Oriented Policing and Crime Prevention**, by Anthony A. Braga (Criminal Justice Press, 2003). Provides a thorough review of significant policing research about problem places, high-activity offenders, and repeat victims, with a focus on the applicability of those findings to problem-oriented policing. Explains how police departments can facilitate problem-oriented policing by improving crime analysis, measuring performance, and securing productive partnerships.
  - **Problem-Oriented Policing: Reflections on the First 20 Years**, by Michael S. Scott (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000). Describes how the most critical elements of Herman Goldstein's problem-oriented policing model have developed in practice over its 20-year history, and proposes future directions for problem-oriented policing. The report is also available at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).
  - **Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News**, by John E. Eck and William Spelman (Police Executive Research Forum, 1987). Explains the rationale behind problem-oriented policing and the problem-solving process, and provides examples of effective problem-solving in one agency.
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- **Problem-Solving Tips: A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder Through Problem-Solving Partnerships** by Karin Schmerler, Matt Perkins, Scott Phillips, Tammy Rinehart and Meg Townsend. (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1998) (also available at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)). Provides a brief introduction to problem-solving, basic information on the SARA model and detailed suggestions about the problem-solving process.
  - **Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies**, Second Edition, edited by Ronald V. Clarke (Harrow and Heston, 1997). Explains the principles and methods of situational crime prevention, and presents over 20 case studies of effective crime prevention initiatives.
  - **Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems: Case Studies in Problem-Solving**, by Rana Sampson and Michael S. Scott (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2000) (also available at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)). Presents case studies of effective police problem-solving on 18 types of crime and disorder problems.
  - **Using Analysis for Problem-Solving: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement**, by Timothy S. Bynum (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2001). Provides an introduction for police to analyzing problems within the context of problem-oriented policing.
  - **Using Research: A Primer for Law Enforcement Managers**, Second Edition, by John E. Eck and Nancy G. LaVigne (Police Executive Research Forum, 1994). Explains many of the basics of research as it applies to police management and problem-solving.
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## Other Problem-Oriented Guides for Police

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