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Collinsville flooded with accidental 911 calls

Police find culprit in old cell phones

By Chris Coates
Thursday, October 2, 2008 10:02 AM CDT

Stock cell phone

Collinsville police and fire dispatchers are being swamped with accidental 911 calls made by children using old cell phones they were given as toys.

"It's nonstop, untraceable calls," said Lisa Kirk, a city telecommunicator who fields dozens of the calls each week. "I think it's getting worse."

Kids get the obsolete cell phones to play with as toys, and because calling plans are usually cancelled, the phones generally can't make calls.

The problem is, almost all cell phones have a safety setting that allows the devices to still dial 911 - even if the calling plan isn't active.

"It will still call 911," Kirk said.

The mostly unknown caveat has resulted in 911 operators across the country receiving thousands of calls each hour from playing toddlers and children taught at an early age about the emergency number.

"It's fairly common, unfortunately," said Roger Hixson, the technical issues director for the National Emergency Number Association, a trade group outside Washington, D.C.

Hixson has been following the trend for years and said the problem touches most police and fire departments.

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button guards wrote on Oct 15, 2008 10:50 PM:

Comments

"An excellent article." The 911 cell phone button guards have been available since the original patents were filed in the U.S. and Canada (2001). These easily applied "peel and stick" rubber O rings surround and protect the preprogrammed 911 button (usually the #9)....accidental activation in guarded against, yet intentional 911 calls are easily attained by pressing thru the O ring. This solution has been successful in a major pilot program which achieved a "decline" in accidental 911 calls by 21% in less than 8 weeks. The Pinellas County Pilot program had 24,000 less accidental calls to answer in the first year of their program. The "solution" product has been displayed to FCC/WTB in Washington D.C. (2003) as well as the APCO and NENA conventions. There have been numerous TV and news articles written to highlight this product. Why has it not been implemented nationwide to save time and lives? Simply put the higher # of 911 calls received the higher the next years budget for additional staff and overtime. There appears to also have been a "stone walling" by the cell phone manufacturers as well as the phone companies which have coordinated the distancing from this solution. The legal implications and public 911 safety downgrading due to poor cell phone face plate/button design appear to be obvious. Please review the solution @ www.stopaccidentalcalls.com "In the News" and draw your own conclusions and call your local 911 center director/manager.....the next delay in 911 response may be your call.

Thank you for your time Dale Lissner pres. SACC an Oregon nonprofit corp.

Please note the above copy has been mildly expanded with useful information from the original news posting.