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# NEWS RELEASE

Benton County dispatchers in the Sheriff's Office serve County residents around the clock, answering 911 calls and sending help whenever it's needed. Many of those calls are coming from cell phone users. Some are real emergencies, but experience shows us that many are accidental calls. Benton County needs your help in reducing the number of unintentional 911 calls so our dispatchers and public safety personnel can focus on those in the midst of an actual emergency.

In 2004, 15% of the calls coming into the Sheriff's Dispatch Center were 911 "hang-up" calls, meaning the caller dialed 911 but did not stay on the line until a dispatcher answered. By 2006, the number of 911 hang-up calls had grown to 20% of all emergency and non-emergency calls to the Dispatch Center. Most callers are unaware that once 911 is dialed, the call keeps ringing until it is picked up in the Dispatch Center, even though the caller may have hung up.

911 dispatchers will attempt to reach the caller to determine the purpose for the call. When the caller's location can be determine and no contact can be made, the 911 dispatcher will send an officer to the location in an effort to determine if an actual emergency exists. All 911 calls are treated as if a real emergency exists, so both dispatchers and officers in the field diligently follow up to make certain everyone is safe. Of course this effort takes time, and when the 911 call was accidental, valuable time can be spent on what later turns out to be no emergency at all.

Much of the increase in 911 hang-up calls can be attributed to the rising use of cell phones. Older cell phones may have a built-in feature in which 911 is called when the number 9 key is pressed down and held. This problem is more pronounced with open-face cell phones. Or, an old, deactivated cell phone with power still in its battery could get a call out to 911. Giving an old cell phone to a child as a toy could be such a source of accidental 911 calls. Also, some cell phone users may program a "speed dial" key themselves for 911 and accidentally push it.

To help the County's 911 dispatchers focus on emergency calls, please consider the following ideas:

- Upgrade your older cell phone to a new one without the 911 auto-dialing or open face features;
- Lock your keypad (depending on your phone, this step may still not prevent a 911 call);
- Do not program 911 into a speed dial key;
- Get a button guard (rubber, stick-on guards that fit around the #9 key or another 911 speed dial key);
- Remove the battery from old cell phones no longer in use;
- If you accidentally make a 911 call, please stay on the line until a dispatcher answers.

Benton County appreciates your help in reducing the number of unintentional 911 calls.

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