

**WSEMA SPRING CONFERENCE  
Tacoma, Wa.  
E911 Advisory Committee Report  
April 18-21, 2006**

**This is a review of the new 211 Service information distributed in early March 2006. The 211 service is an information and referral service created to connect people with direct access to health, human and social services by dialing 211. On February 22, 2006, the 211 service was implemented in the Washington state in the following counties: Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom, King, Clark, Greater Columbia, Benton, Franklin, Kittitas Walla Walla and Yakima.**

**211 calls are separate from 911 as they are for non-life threatening calls and situations that do not require a response from fire services, law enforcement or emergency medical. The 211 service was created by Chapter 43.211 and language in 43.211.005 applicable to emergency management includes, “for public access to information after a natural or nonnatural disaster will benefit the people of the state of Washington by providing easier access and by reducing inefficiencies in connecting people with the desired service providers and by reducing duplication of efforts.” Consequently, if 211 services is available in your area, or soon to be available, you may wish to meet with the 211 provider to discuss/define how this service would be carried out in your particular county. E911 centers have chosen to enter into a Memorandum of Understand (MOU) with the 211 service provider, and this may be a good choice for emergency managers. As you are aware, following a disaster it can be imperative that each agency have clear expectations of what another agency will provide.**

**Pandemic Flu: Jim Ricks, San Juan County E911 Coordinator, gave a presentation at the March 16, Advisory Committee Meeting on exercises being conducted by 911 PSAPs on local procedures for responding to a pandemic. From the emergency management perspective I was glad to see this critical issue being taken seriously. However, it does appear there is some misunderstanding of just how pandemic calls would be handled. While there is no question 911 Centers may be inundated with pandemic calls, this emergency would undoubtedly be coordinated as in any other major emergency/disaster through local activated Emergency Operations Centers with a broad range of agencies providing information including health officials. Consequently, extensive coordination on this issue between all appropriate local and state agencies is essential to develop effective operational procedures.**

**Thousands of Hurricane Katrina 911 calls went astray: (November 08. Washington Post) This article describes how an emergency can escalate. “Early in the afternoon of August 29, 2005, as Hurricane Katrina bore down on the Gulf Coast, the phones inside the Louisiana State Police emergency operations center began ringing with frantic pleas for help. However, flood waters had forced 120 operators at the 9-1-1 Center to abandon the New Orleans police headquarters. Emergency calls were supposed to be**

routed to the fire department, but its *main station was already abandoned*. And so many calls were shunted north to Baton Rouge, LA. The disintegration of New Orleans's 911 system carries national implications for future disasters, said public safety experts. While some communities boast sophisticated, high-tech centers with elaborate contingency plans, most cities have older systems lacking adequate back-up measures for massive disasters. "People in our country have gotten to believe that no matter what kind of trouble you get into, all you have to do is dial 9-1-1," said William Smith, Chief Technology Officer at BellSouth, which is the phone carrier for New Orleans 911 calls. "That's not necessarily the case." The 911 network is actually little more than a patchwork, subject to the budgetary pressures and technological whims of local and state governments, with no national standards.

While Washington State is one of the states with sophisticated E911 centers with backup centers to route calls to in the event a center must be abandoned, the above real event illuminates problems that can occur --- just at the point that communication is the most *critical*. It also highlights the importance of coordination between local 911 Centers and Emergency Management to identify local back-up contingency plans.

**Report Submitted by:**

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