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CAL POLY UNIVERSITY POLICE DEPARTMENT TESTS NEW PROGRAM
TO REDUCE NON-EMERGENCY 9-1-1 CALLS

San Luis Obispo, Calif. – The Cal Poly University Police Department is teaming up with the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to begin a pilot public education campaign aimed at reducing the number of non-emergency 9-1-1 calls placed to the 9-1-1 system.

“We want callers to know that 9-1-1 is about saving lives,” said Public Safety Communications Assistant Director Karen Wong. “Excessive calls to 9-1-1 for non-emergencies can tie up the phone lines, slow response times, and can make the difference between life and death. The purpose of the California 9-1-1 Branch Education and Awareness Pilot Program is to educate the public on the use of 9-1-1 and about what constitutes a real emergency. This could help to reduce the number of non-emergency calls.”

This pilot public education campaign is important in light of new statewide 9-1-1 caller research that showed nearly 25 percent of all calls to the California 9-1-1 system are non-emergency calls.*

“Our survey found that consumers make a variety of non-emergency calls ranging from calls about non-violent public disturbances and animal nuisances, to power outages and requests for directions,” said William Anderson, Interim Manager of the California 9-1-1 Emergency Communications Branch.

During the next few months, Cal Poly University Police Department will be conducting local outreach to educate the public about the proper use of 9-1-1. Cal Poly University Police Department will share information with the public at events and will also be advertising in print, radio, and online media, including public service announcements, online banner ads, posters, and social media. Tip cards will also be distributed with information to help the public understand when to call 9-1-1, and where to call for situations that are not 9-1-1 emergencies.

*Survey Methodology: The online survey was conducted in October 2013 among a panel sample of 1000 California respondents, age 18+ who said they had called 9-1-1 in California in the past two years, and was augmented with in-person interviews.
In 2013, according to data collected from California’s Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS), there were 25.7 million 9-1-1 calls placed in California; Cal Poly University Police Department received more than 2,700 of these 9-1-1 calls.

“Reducing the number of non-emergency calls to 9-1-1 will help ensure that the lines are free for real emergencies so that emergency responders can be quickly dispatched in situations where every second counts,” said Cal Poly University Police Department Dispatch Supervisor Patty Cash-Henning. “True 9-1-1 emergencies include any serious situation where there is a crime in progress or when fire, emergency medical, or law enforcement help is needed.”

There is also good news in this first-ever survey of the 9-1-1 system and its users. Most 9-1-1 callers do understand when to properly use it. More than 90 percent of California 9-1-1 callers could identify true emergencies, including serious medical crises, violent attacks, highway incidents where law enforcement, fire or medical personnel is needed, a burglary or theft in progress, and fire. Additionally, more than 80 percent agree that situations like a public disturbance, animal issues, the reporting of a loss of property (not in progress), and non-life threatening medical issues, are not 9-1-1 emergencies.

But the survey also found that about 25 percent of respondents would like information about when not to call 9-1-1.

“We know most people use the system as intended, and we also know that most people want to do the right thing. This public education campaign is designed to help inform those who aren’t sure,” Cash-Henning said.

Cal Poly University Police Department is just one of the 454 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in California that take 9-1-1 calls. The other PSAPs participating in this pilot public education campaign, in addition to Cal Poly University Police Department, are Elk Grove Police Department, Anaheim Police Department, Calaveras County Sheriff’s Department, and Shasta Area Safety Communications Agency (SHASCOM-911).

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