



Contacting the Police

While the idea of “contacting the police” might seem simple enough, there are actually many things to consider when contemplating the timeliness and type of police assistance required. Let’s look at the ever-growing list of police contact procedures:

Calling 911

The 911 system is the best, quickest and most reliable method of contacting police, fire and medical help in an emergency situation. 911 is also often misunderstood and abused.

Use 911 if:

- *You see a crime in progress*
- *There is significant injury or the threat of injury either to yourself or others*
- *You need emergency help ASAP – some examples are residential break and enter, vehicle collision, robbery, fire, assault, witnessing an obviously impaired driver, domestic violence occurring, etc.*

911 is not for:

- *Barking dogs, road conditions, weather conditions, aggravating neighbours, lost keys, tracking down a specific police officer or reporting an internet scam*

When reporting an emergency try to stay calm, share your information clearly and follow instructions. In most cases, simply dialing the three digit number from a land line and saying nothing will illicit an aggressive police response. If you have access to the 911 system, use it sparingly and don’t slow the system down for those whose lives may depend on it.

Dialing *OPP

In a non-emergency situation, an easy way to contact the Ontario Provincial Police is by hitting the * symbol, then the letters OPP. An individual can use this system to report an



important, non-urgent situation that will be handled by the OPP dispatcher or forwarded to the appropriate agency.

Examples include: vehicle break down (disabled) and no other help available (non-emergency situation); reporting a potentially dangerous traffic situation that is not urgent; suspicious but non-urgent activity, vehicles, persons.

Verify cell phone access to *OPP with your service provider.

Police Administrative Phone Numbers

Police agencies offer a variety of services during business hours, with administrative phone lines that can be used for tracking down an officer, confirming hours and public access, speaking with clerical or command staff, initiating a complaint, and more. Check your police services administrative number in the phone book or online.

This is normally not a number to be used for reporting an emergency, so do not be disappointed if a taped message greets you outside of business hours.

Police Websites

For the most comprehensive breakdown of services and programs available in your community, go directly to your local police website. The list of services will be long but it’s often interesting: divisional / detachment locators, crime

prevention, traffic safety, fraud prevention, local crime trends, specialized units, complaints process, missing persons, victim services, etc. Most police resources can be explored in great detail through their public websites.

Crime Stoppers

The Crime Stoppers program can forward details about a crime to the correct police service. If you have information about criminal activity but do not want to be identified or involved, dial **1-800-222-TIPS (8477)**. Your anonymity is assured – no testifying, no court. Many arrests have been made, stolen property recovered and missing persons located through Crime Stoppers. **USE IT!** Learn more by searching online for your local Crime Stoppers program.

Road Watch

Many police services are now linked to the community driven ROAD WATCH program that allows citizens to report aggressive drivers. If you witness an incident and can safely record the incident’s location and the offending vehicle plate number, you can enter the information on their website. A letter will be sent to the registered vehicle owner. You must supply your information but it’s never shared by the police. Learn more, and see if your area is participating in this ever expanding program by visiting www.roadwatch.com.

Hotline

Major police investigations that require a rapid supply of public information can rely on an investigative Hotline phone number. Examples include missing persons cases with foul play suspected, or an escaped or dangerous individual threatening public safety.

In these rare occasions a police Hotline number will be shared via traditional media outlets, social media and police websites. A quickly established and wide spread Hotline is intended to gather investigative leads as quickly as possible without bogging down the 911 system. If a major occurrence is taking place, try to write down the publicized Hotline number in case you come across information.



If you want to contact the police feel free to walk into your local police office. Most urban areas have a 24 hour desk officer to assist you.

“Walk-In”

Feel free to walk into your local police office. Most urban areas have a 24 hour desk officer who can assist you. More remote services operate 24 hours a day, but may have all officers out on patrol. If so, pick up the telephone located at the main door, speak to the dispatcher and an officer will quickly respond.

Social Media

In recent years, police services have turned to Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites. Investigators scan media sites and post investigative information and public updates. Police school resources and youth officers have also established important links to young people via social media. 911 is still recommended in an emergency, but the ever expanding use of handheld devices is attracting more and more officers and specialized units to social media as a way to connect to the public.



THE MCLENNAN GROUP
SAFETY TIPS

The McLennan Group works with OPP Sergeant Bob Paterson (Retired) to develop and promote these practical safety tips
To learn more, visit www.tmgssafetytips.ca