When a 911 call is received from a person who does not speak English, the operator dials into the AT&T service and requests an interpreter who speaks the required language. In Omaha, the 911 center receives calls in several different languages, in addition to English and Spanish, such as Vietnamese, Lithuanian, Czechoslovakian, Russian and Italian. The operators take this very seriously, and try to ensure that needs of all callers are met.

In addition, every 911 position is equipped with a TTY machine for the hearing or speech-impaired caller.

Over 600,000 calls are received a year by the 911 center, and 85% of them are answered in less than 10 seconds. But, there are times when the number of calls that come into 911 are beyond the operators’ capability of answering. This normally happens when there is an auto accident, and all of the drivers use their cell phones to call 911 to report the same accident. Since 911 receives no information on their computer screen about the caller, the location or the phone numbers from a cell phone, these calls take a little longer to answer and process. The important thing to remember is that if you dial 911, and it keeps ringing, do not hang-up. The calls are answered in the order in which they are received.

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The 911 system was started in the United States in February, 1968, and Omaha’s system was activated in 1970. With this first system, the 911 operator had to obtain the caller’s name, phone number and location. In 1993, Omaha implemented an enhanced 911 system, which automatically displays the caller’s phone number and address when the operator answers.

Today, the 911 operators answer with the statement “911, what is your emergency?” so the appropriate fire, police or medical response can be started as soon as possible. If the caller states that he needs a fire or medical response, the call is immediately transferred to dispatchers trained in fire and medical emergencies. Most of the time, while an operator is asking questions, a dispatcher is sending the fire engine or rescue squad. So even while you are being questioned, help is on its way. The fire dispatchers have the capability to give certain medical instructions to help stabilize a victim before help arrives. They are also trained in severe medical cases and can direct a caller on how to give CPR, deliver a baby or help with a victim who is choking. It’s important to remember that the questions they ask are necessary and do not slow the response.

If the caller identifies that he has a police emergency, the call is immediately handled by the first operator who answers the phone. This operator also will ask several questions to try to get the exact information needed to classify the call according to the priorities that have been established by the Omaha Police Department. The operator needs to verify the address and phone number of the caller to make sure that the information displayed to him or her on the computer screen is correct. The information given by the caller is then used to classify the call.

Priority 1 Calls
The highest type of call; will be dispatched before all others. These calls include kidnapping, armed robbery, crimes of violence that are life-threatening, drownings and personal injury accidents.

Priority 2 Calls
These are life-threatening, or extremely dangerous, situations and are “in progress” at the time of the call. Included in this category are assaults, auto theft, burglary, child abuse, disturbance, gunshots in the area, robbery, sexual assault, suicide and suspicious activity.

Priority 3 Calls
These are report-type calls, such as after the suspect has left the scene, there are no injuries and the caller wishes to be seen by an officer. Examples of these calls are auto theft over one half hour old, barking dogs, destruction of property, theft, loud party complaints, noise disturbance, prostitution, threats and vandalism. These calls won’t get dispatched until all Priority 1 and 2 calls have been dispatched. Normally the caller will be advised of a possible 2 to 4 hour delay before dispatch -- depending on the activity that is occurring within the precinct at that time.

Priority 4 Calls
These are priority 3 calls, such as noise complaints, in which the callers do not want to be seen by an officer for fear of retaliation by the offending party. It can be up to four hours before an officer can check on the complaint. Usually the caller will not know if the police have responded. (These calls will be up-graded to Priority 3 if the caller wishes to speak to the responding officer.)

Since not all 911 operators are bi-lingual, the 911 center uses the AT&T language line.