

## Press Release

Contact: Ashtabula County Commissioners Office  
Phone: 440.576.3750

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### **County 9-1-1 system can track calls from old cell phones with new technology**

Ashtabula County's new cell phone tracking technology is not only saving lives, it is also helping to prosecute those who make frivolous or fraudulent 9-1-1 calls from cell phones that do not have a wireless service provider.

Ashtabula County 9-1-1 operations recently completed a new hardware and software system upgrade that can interpret latitude and longitude information from most newer cell phones, to locate a 9-1-1 cell phone caller on a map.

Car accidents and other incidents that happen outdoors are most often reported via cell phones. In fact, 60 percent of 9-1-1 calls answered at the county's seven Public Safety Answering Point sites come from cell phones.

While this technology helps first responders to pinpoint the location of emergency situations called in by cell phone users, it has proven to have another use for law enforcement.

In March, the Ashtabula County Sheriff's Department and Ashtabula Police Department used this new technology to locate and prosecute people who abused the 9-1-1 system by using "disconnected" cell phones to make bogus 9-1-1 calls. They ranged from children innocently playing with cell phones to ones making bomb threats.

"Sometimes parents think there is no harm in giving a cell phone that has no service to a child or even their teenager," said Janet Boland, Ashtabula County's 9-1-1 Coordinator. "They do not realize the cell phone is still able to dial 9-1-1."

"Parents unknowingly give old cell phones to children to play with, thinking they could not 'dial out,' or the child would only play the games on the phone," said Lt. Greg Leonhard of the Ashtabula County Sheriff's Department. "What parents are not aware of is, their child calls 9-1-1 and ties up the dispatchers and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) response teams. This not only costs the county money, but also ultimately could cost someone their life when emergency teams are busy responding to fraudulent 9-1-1 calls."

“It takes a combined effort of everyone working together to locate and prosecute the 9-1-1 offenders,” Boland added.

It all starts with the 9-1-1 dispatcher who answers the 9-1-1 call, who then forwards that information to the 9-1-1 Coordinator, who then contacts other resources such as wireless carriers, the FCC Watch Center and then forwards that information to the investigating police departments.

“It is a very satisfying feeling to know that there is a system in place that enables us to locate the source of fraudulent 9-1-1 calls,” Boland said. “With everyone pulling their resources together, we can keep the citizens in Ashtabula County safer.”

Ashtabula County Commissioner Daniel R. Claypool agreed, noting that Ashtabula County is fortunate to have this technology in place, while most other counties in Ohio are still working to acquire it.

Commissioner Joe Moroski noted that the recent activities described above are particularly timely, since the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners has joined the U.S. Congress and other local and national organizations in declaring April as 9-1-1 Education Month.

Learning about 9-1-1 isn't as simple as finding the numbers on the telephone dial, Boland said. It is also about understanding how the system works, and how it can affect your everyday life.

For example, a little-known source of bogus 9-1-1 calls arises from home cordless phones when they are not properly charged, she said. The phone will give off a certain tone (that the human ear does not hear) that will send a call into the 9-1-1 center, giving a false alarm to the dispatchers. The dispatcher will call the number back, only to have the resident tell them they did not call, or no one was home at that time.

“We encourage everyone to keep their cordless phones on the handsets and fully charged when not in use,” Boland said. “If you want to leave the phone off the hook for convenience purposes, just make sure that the battery is fully charged first.”

For more information about the 9-1-1 System, contact Janet Boland, 9-1-1 Coordinator, at (440) 576-3795.