

KHOG Safety Article, August 2017: "Can You Hear Me Now? - Part IV"

While doing research for this series of articles on emergency communications, particularly for motorcycle enthusiasts, I came across a very well-written article from April 2015, titled "Tips & Tricks for Using Your Cell Phone in Emergencies" on the website www.puretalkusa.com. While it is important to understand the process of an emergency call, I also found this article to be quite insightful and wanted to share it with you. If I find myself in any emergency situation, whether on motorcycle or not, I need every advantage to stack the odds in my favor. We don't want to just merely survive as motorcycle enthusiasts, we're fundamentally predisposed to THRIVE as motorcycle enthusiasts. If an emergency takes me out of the game, then I lose...and I hate losing!

There's no doubt that we're a wireless society now. As landlines become less and less prominent in our lives, our communication habits have changed... and that goes for emergency communications, too.

According to the FCC, approximately 70% of 911 calls are placed by wireless phones. This shift has created unique challenges and guidelines for using your cell phone in an emergency situation: like what to do if you don't have service, how to make sure your location is known, and what to do if the call ends.

Despite these challenges, cell phones can be great tools in emergencies—whether it's a car accident, robbery, or you're just plain stranded. In fact, cell phones are often recommended in survival kits. So, here are some tips and tricks to remember for emergency cell phone use:

1) "NO SERVICE" DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN NO SERVICE.

How many times have you seen "zero bars" on your phone and put it away instead of trying to make a call? Well if you're trying to call 911, DON'T make this mistake. Thanks to the FCC, network providers must transmit an emergency call (911) regardless of whether you use their service or not.

So what does this mean? Well, if your provider doesn't have coverage in that area, your phone will show that it has no service. But, another provider may offer coverage there and will transmit your 911 call for you, so definitely give the call a try.

You can also reach 911 with a cell phone that is not associated with a provider. This means the old phone you have stored away can be a great emergency device. As long as it has battery power and can reach a signal, your phone can connect to 911. However, keep in mind this means your call cannot be returned because there isn't a number associated with your device. So, if the call gets disconnected, you need to be the one to call back.

2) CAN'T MAKE A CALL? KEEP YOUR PHONE ON.

If you've tried to reach 911 and still can't get a call through, you're probably in an area with no service—period. Although it may seem counterintuitive, don't turn your phone off. Before your phone sends out the call, it makes contact with the closest tower: a concept called a digital handshake.

Your phone leaves a data trail that is stored with your service provider and indicates the last time you attempted to place a call—even if the call didn't go through. This can help emergency personnel pinpoint your location even if you can't get a call out. It can also let them know to keep trying to get to you! However, this can only work if emergency personnel know your service provider... so be sure to share this information with any emergency contacts and include it in your emergency kit.

3) GET TEXT SAVVY

If you can't get a call out, don't lose hope! Did you know text messages can sometimes go through when calls won't? If you need a quick way to get in touch with family during an emergency situation, try a text. When the cellular network is crowded, a text may have a better chance at slipping through than a call would (similar to using your phone in a crowded sports stadium). A text may also go through when you have a low signal because it takes less bandwidth to transmit.

4) LEARN TO SAVE BATTERY

It likely comes as no surprise that battery conservation is essential during emergency situations. Oftentimes, you won't have the opportunity (or the ability) to charge your phone. You can save battery by reducing the backlight on your phone, turning off any extra features like WiFi, Bluetooth, and any running applications, and keeping the phone in a cool place. You'll also want to be sure you're only using the device when you absolutely need to. If you're going to be using the device frequently, do not turn it off between calls or texts. Repeatedly turning your device off and on actually uses a significant amount of battery power.

5) ESTABLISH AN ICE CONTACT

What happens if you're in a situation where you can't communicate with emergency personnel or relatives? This is where an ICE (In Case of Emergency) contact is crucial. Store your emergency contact in your phone with ICE before their name so aides know who to contact if you can't tell them yourself. Make sure the kids also have your number stored in their phones as ICE as well. So for example, this would read "ICE Mom" or "ICE Dad".

These tips and tricks are certainly helpful and I hope you are able to integrate these into your thought processes should you ever find yourself in an emergency situation.

Contacting 911 is stressful. The only reason we should ever call that number is because of an emergency. The dispatchers at the end of the line are highly-skilled at working with you to get the information they need. However, there are a few things to keep in mind when calling them. The first, if possible, is to make sure you are in a safe location to be a communicator, a helper to

the emergency responders.

Another important item is to understand where you are. Sure, the article talks about the technology that can be used to help locate you, but some of it can take a lot of time - time you do not have if you are in a life-threatening situation. Along with the road you are on, pay attention to your surroundings. Sometimes being able to identify a nearby building or land feature can help dispatchers and responders locate you as well.

Lastly, as much as possible, keep calm. Take a couple deep breaths while dialing and waiting on the dispatchers to answer. This will help you focus and more clearly communicate. Also: don't be surprised if they ask you to hold while they transfer the call to an appropriate agency.

While we never want to have to dial 911 for an emergency, it is important to know how to communicate the need for help. In this series we have discussed multiple ways motorcycle enthusiasts can do this as well as many features that your mobile phones may have to help you. Now that you are armed with the security of being able to confidently ask for help in an emergency, get out and ride and enjoy! Sign up for a rider safety course, and live to ride another day!

...and "Hey! Let's be CAREFUL out there!"

Matt Thomason
Safety Officer
Kirkwood Harley Owners Group