What is the Number for 9-1-1?

A frequent complaint that I receive (mostly from parents) is that the fire department did not respond to a fire alarm at their apartment building. The calls I receive claim their son or daughter and roommates evacuated, but no one ever showed up from a public safety agency.

Depending on the age and size of an apartment building, the alarm system may not have been required to be monitored by a supervising station at the time of construction. In this instance, there should be a sign located at all manual alarms that reads 'WHEN ALARM SOUNDS – CALL FIRE DEPARTMENT.' Or, the message may be provided permanently on the alarm box by the manufacturer.

What makes this situation worse is that students are ever reliant on social media and portable smart devices. It seems that many have missed how to report an incident to emergency services. Or, calling 9-1-1. This seems especially true when they are reporting what does not appear to be an emergency to them. Instead, the caller will Google the name of the town's fire department or police department. Sometimes, this number may forward to a public safety answering point. Others may get a voicemail if the phone does not ring in an attended location. That said, it is not uncommon to have a message waiting on Monday morning regarding an alarm sounding from Friday night.

So, how do we correct this?

Some of these situations may auto-correct over time when the alarm system is upgraded in the building. Today's codes would require a fire alarm system to be

supervised when the installation of the alarm is required based on the use group. The supervising station must be in accordance with NFPA-72.

Better signage could be installed – having the sign read 'WHEN ALARM SOUNDS – CALL 9-1-1.' Or, the appropriate emergency service number if 9-1-1 is not available. Some phone systems installed in buildings require dialing '9' for an outside line, so in this instance a lobby phone may have a sign that states – CALL 9-9-1-1.

Property managers could distribute information to tenants about how to reach public safety agencies, as well as a reminder of the maintenance number to report alarm issues. It would be helpful for property managers to update tenants of the cause of an alarm, and to thank those that evacuated or took appropriate actions.

As we deal with newer buildings, or high-rise buildings there are also requirements for Emergency Voice communication systems. In this instance we now options to utilize provide customized messages and specific instructions to the building's occupants.

The fire department or management may also use the voice feature to update occupants about the alarm conditions, the need for additional floors to evacuate, or give the all-clear message and even details of why the alarm sounded.

As technology changes many of the human variable is being replaced. Sometimes this is good. However, we will still have the need to train our communities about all emergencies and methods to call for help. We need to encourage occupants to call 9-1-1 to report an alarm sounding and especially any related

conditions that they observe. This goes in line with the 'See Something – Say Something' campaign. The first responders can then decide if it is an emergency, or not.

Tim

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Tim has been active with The Center for Campus Fire Safety since its inception and served as treasurer from 2007 to 2010.

EMERGENCY
IF FIRE ALARM SOUNDS
CALL 911

ATTENTION
WHEN FIRE ALARM SOUNDS
CALL FIRE DEPARTMENT
911

He is a frequent presenter at Campus Fire Forum, an instructor for the Fire-Wise Campus program and served as project manager for Campus Fire Data.

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