For more information, check out the Joint Communications Web site at www.gocolumbiamo.com/PSJC. Emergency protocols for more information, check out the Joint Communications Web site at www.gocolumbiamo.com/PSJC. Joint Communications subscribes to, which gives operators access to interpreters who speak more than 140 languages.

TIPS FOR CALLING 911

When calling from a cell phone, have your exact location, the name of the road and the direction you are traveling, and your phone number ready. When calling 911, have your full names, your parents' full names, your addresses, phone numbers, and your employer, work number and what your exact location is, the name of your employer and your work number, what an emergency is and when to dial 911, how to hold the phone so they speak clearly, that calling 911 as a joke is against the law, not to be afraid to dial 911.

Secondly, Sapp said, "If we can keep that equipment in quarters and prevent them from going on a non-emergency call, it is certainly beneficial to someone who may call with a true emergency." After the U.S. 63 incident, Sapp said, the Fire Department re-examined its policy on not responding to accidents with unknown injuries. Fire officials talked with Columbia police, Sapp said, and decided the policy was sound.

The Fire Department uses a tiered response system that relies on 911 dispatchers and computer software to prioritize calls and decide which fire or ambulance services respond. In addition to accidents with unknown injuries and dispatched Columbia police to investigate. Police spent about 20 minutes searching with headlights and flashlights, but found nothing.

Nine times out of 10, a 911 call reporting an accident will turn out to be nothing, Purves said, but the call should generate an automatic Fire Department response.

The Boone County Fire Protection District responds to all medical situations relayed from 911; the Columbia Fire Department is more selective. The pre-established response protocols of these agencies are integrated in the computer programs used by dispatchers to prioritize calls and decide which fire or ambulance services respond. The difference in protocols highlights what some see as a weakness in the local emergency response network: While 911 calls are routed through a central command post, there are differences in the ways the two fire departments and two ambulance services respond.

"We certainly don't want to run emergency equipment to incidents that the police or other agencies may handle," Purves said. "Why not?"

In spite of the system designed to help dispatchers with emergency calls, the protocols can cause confusion as to who should respond to specific emergencies.

By KATE MOSER and BECCA EDEN

Decoding 911

When did this happen? What is happening now? Why? Who is involved? Is anyone injured?

When calling 911, have your exact location, the name of the road and the direction you are traveling, and your phone number ready. When calling 911, have your full names, your parents' full names, your addresses, phone numbers, and your employer, work number and what an emergency is and when to dial 911, how to hold the phone so they speak clearly, that calling 911 as a joke is against the law, not to be afraid to dial 911.

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