



Sometimes when I call 911 from Washington, DC, I get a neighboring jurisdiction. Why is that?

When you call 911 in Washington, DC, you expect to get the Washington, DC Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), known as the Office of Unified Communications. But sometimes that doesn't happen. Often when we hear this from residents or visitors, they tell us they were first routed to Montgomery County or Prince George's County, MD or Alexandria or Arlington, VA.

So, why does this happen?

Cell phone calls, including 911 calls, are routed through cell phone towers. Sometimes, the location where the cell phone call is being made and where the cell phone tower it's being routed through are not in the same jurisdiction.

For example, if you're on 30th Place and Perry Street, NE and make a 911 call from your cell phone, you may be first connected with Prince George's County, because the closest cell phone tower to where you are is in Prince George's County.

What about location-based routing technologies?

Location-based routing technologies allow cellular carriers to route wireless 911 calls based on location information gathered from the handset, rather than the location of the cell tower. In 2018, the Federal Communications Commission released a Notice of Inquiry and many carriers started pushing location-based technologies and routing on their networks. This made it so the number of misrouted calls were greatly reduced. But that didn't fix everything so sometimes calls are still routed to neighboring jurisdictions.

What to know!

- You should **ALWAYS** call 911 if there is an emergency.
 - Your call takes priority over 10-digit lines.
 - We have your telephone number and a location, even if that location is the cell phone tower address.
 - We often have the ability to “rebid” your location and because of FCC regulations, we have the ability of usually find you within a radius of three (3) meters.
 - We have the ability to do a one button transfer (which takes about 2 to 3 seconds) and transfer your call with the phone number and dynamic location to another jurisdiction.
 - You can make sure that your phone is updated with the most recent technology. In older model phones, make sure the location is turned on so that information can be passed through to 911 centers. Newer model phones are always providing location for calls and texts to 911 because of regulations by the FCC.

These things DON'T happen if you call a ten-digit number; only if you call 911.

What is OUC doing to remedy this?

We work with our neighbors and the cellular carriers to minimize this occurrence from happening. We often audit tower sites to identify where the majority of the calls originate from. Just recently, we worked with Montgomery County to reroute calls from a tower in their jurisdiction to our center because a majority of the 911 calls that routed through that particular cell phone tower were for emergencies in our city.

If you have a call that routed to a neighboring jurisdiction prior to coming to DC – you can help us out by letting us know via our website or email at ouc.director@dc.gov.