



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – June 19, 2017
Contact: Maria Jameson-Owens, Deputy Director, (360)307-5820

SAVE 911 CALLS FOR TRUE EMERGENCIES

To avoid overwhelming the 911 system over this year's Fourth of July holiday, KITSAP 911 is encouraging the public to call 360-307-5811 with non-emergent complaints.

(BREMERTON, Wash.) – The 4th of July holiday is a notoriously busy time for emergency responders. 911 centers are universally inundated with 911 calls.

Following overwhelming call volume that nearly paralyzed the system with non-emergency calls during the 2015 holiday, officials at KITSAP 911 are asking the public to think carefully before calling 911 during this year's Fourth of July holiday. Unless there is an immediate danger or life-threatening situation, the public should avoid calling 911. This allows callers with true emergencies to reach 911 when needed. **For non-emergent complaints, officials have set up a special non-emergency line -- 360-307-5811 -- that will be in operation from Friday June 30, 2017 at 1 PM through Wednesday July 5, 2017 at 7 AM.**

It isn't unusual that 911 centers would become overloaded with non-emergency fireworks calls on the Fourth of July. The number of calls in 2015 was unprecedented. Call receivers and dispatchers were inundated with non-stop ringing phones and constant radio traffic. At the peak, 223 calls were answered between 10 and 11 p.m. That is about seven times the average number of calls in an hour. It is unknown how many callers received fast busy signals as the system became overwhelmed. Officials are concerned that, under these circumstances, callers reporting life-threatening emergencies may be unable to get help. Kitsap 911 does bring in additional staff to manage the increased workload however there is a limit to the number of calls the 911 system can handle.

Due to the heavy workload associated with the 4th of July holiday, law enforcement agencies must triage their workload and their ability to respond based on the level of threat to safety of citizens and property. For this reason, all Kitsap County law enforcement agencies will not be responding to firework complaints that pose no imminent threat to life or property. This allows personnel resources to be utilized for emergency responses. Citizens may call their local law enforcement office during business hours for further information on responses to firework complaints in their area.

To avoid overwhelming the 911 system over this year's Fourth of July holiday, KITSAP 911 is encouraging the public to call 360-307-5811 with non-emergent complaints. From Friday June 30, 2017 at 1 PM through Wednesday July 5, 2017 at 7 AM, that number will ring into the 911 center but calls will be handled as a lower priority than 911 emergency calls. Says KITSAP 911 Deputy Director Maria Jameson-Owens, "If someone believes that fireworks are posing an imminent threat of fire or injury, they should call 911. We ask citizens to really consider whether their complaint is worth potentially blocking 911 access from someone who is having a heart attack before they dial."

Local law enforcement and fire agencies worked together with KITSAP 911 to develop comprehensive plans to work through the heavy and dynamic workload associate with the 4th of July holiday. Says KITSAP 911 Deputy Director Maria Jameson-Owens, "We believe we are well prepared to handle this upcoming holiday. Kitsap 911 is thankful for our law and fire/EMS partners. Everyone stay safe and enjoy the holiday."

KITSAP 911 provides 911 call receiving as well as dispatching for law enforcement, fire, emergency medical and animal control services in Kitsap County and its four incorporated cities.

#