When should you call 911?

On Aug. 8, 2014, a postal employee working at the Bay Valley district office suffered a head injury that rightfully should have resulted in an immediate call to 911 for medical assistance. The protocol, however, required that no employee call 911, but rather notify a supervisor, who in turn would notify the postal police, who then were authorized to call 911. Well, the first leg of that journey took 12 minutes, and the second leg took an additional 11 minutes to even call 911, let alone the time they would take to respond. The employee died from their injuries.

This event resulted in an investigation by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), which issued its final report (#HR-MA-15-003) on March 17, 2015. In its investigation, it discovered that some of the phones in the plant do not allow a call to access 911 directly. The report states that:

"Requiring calls for medical assistance to flow through a chain of command could cause miscommunication and delayed medical services. Delays in communicating with emergency services may result in a longer response time, confusion, and delayed medical treatment. The delays could result in more serious injury or death..."

The conclusion drawn in the OIG report indicates that there was a need to revise the policy, to put in place clear and consistent guidance for handling medical emergencies and to modify the phone system to give employees the ability to call 911 directly. The report states that:

"When should you call 911? Immediately—whenever you feel that there is a medical emergency."

This is insane.

I say this because this is not the first time, and I bet it is not the last time, that a manager would put your health at risk to try to keep an injury off the radar. Management/supervision should have immediately called 911 to protect that carrier from further harm. They failed to follow the instructions that are a required posting, as per Section 866.4 of the ELM above, but we doubt they or any other manager will be held accountable. You know a carrier would be held accountable (blamed) at every opportunity.

When should you call 911? Immediately—whenever you feel that there is a medical emergency, whether you are calling for yourself or for another employee who cannot do so.