

When should you call 911?



Manuel L. Peralta Jr.

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.

Prior to the final report, OIG notified USPS headquarters of the findings and recommendations. To its credit, USPS headquarters immediately notified the unions of Article 19 changes to the Emergency Call Procedures (USPS 3802 2/19/15) as found in the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)* as follows:

866 Medical Emergencies

866.1 General

In the event of a medical emergency, immediate and appropriate medical care must be provided. A medical emergency is an injury or sudden and unexpected onset of a condition requiring immediate medical care. Some problems are considered emergencies because, if not treated promptly, they might become more serious (for example: animal bites, eye injuries, deep cuts, broken bones, etc.). Others are emergencies because they are potentially life-threatening (for example: heart attacks, strokes, weapon wounds, the sudden inability to breathe, etc.). In the event there is doubt as to the urgent nature of the emergency, it should be han-

dled as an emergency (ELM 545.41). In the event of a medical emergency, ensure immediate medical care is provided for the employee. (Emphasis added.)

866.3 Emergency Procedures

The recommended procedures for handling medical emergencies on postal premises are as follows:

a. Immediately contact 911.

b. After a 911 call is initiated or attempted, the Postal Police and any onsite health services professional should be immediately notified. This notification should include specific information as to where the ill/injured employee is located (floor, unit, column, or room number, etc.) and the nature of the illness or injury, if known.

866.4 Posting Emergency Procedures

Instructions to be followed in an emergency must be posted in health services offices and on bulletin boards at appropriate places throughout the facility.

On June 13, 2016, a letter carrier working in Pennsylvania called his supervisors to report that he was suffering in the heat, was struggling and that he would be taking extra breaks. He was told to be safe and drink extra fluids and return when he was done. That supervisor should have immediately gone out to check on the welfare of the employee. The carrier continued, but in 10 minutes he called again to advise that he could not finish and felt like he was going to pass out. The same supervisor told him to sit tight and that he had to call another manager for instructions, and then arrived at the route about 15 minutes later. In spite of the medical condition that the supervisor observed, he instructed the carrier to drive the vehicle back to the office.

“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.