

# Berrien Now Offering Smart911 Service

## Online profiles provide vital info to responders

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BENTON TOWN-SHIP Berrien County emergency dispatchers and responders want to get to know you better, and the technology is available to make that connection and enhance safety in the community.

The county emergency dispatch department announced that Smart911 service is available for residents to provide internet based profiles of their family members and homes to help fire, police and other responders in reacting to a crisis. The same service is available to business owners through RAVE Facility.

David Agens, director of the Berrien County 911 centers in Benton Township and Niles, said the system aids responders in pinpointing the location of a call and alerting them to what they should expect at the site.

By setting up an account at Smart911.com, residents provide such information as specific locations, the number of residents at the home, any special needs and medical conditions, even pets. Participants provide as much or as little information as they feel is necessary, and maintain their own profile, Agens said.

The expansion of

Smart911 service throughout Michigan has been made possible through a \$2.2 million statewide grant that will fund the program at call centers for 18 months. As of February of this year, 28 of the 144 call districts in Michigan had adopted the system (Van Buren County has had Smart911 since 2013). With the grant, between 50 and 75 districts are in the planning stages or have already launched their program.

Nationwide, 32 million people have set up Smart911 profiles.

Agens said Berrien County has had a system that allowed residents to mail in a profile that was connected to land lines and manually entered into a database, but Smart911 will be more comprehensive and easier to update.

This service has become increasingly necessary with the use of cellphones, which make up about 80 percent of emergency calls. The problem is that cellphone calls do not provide an address. Cell towers only pin-point the location of a call within 100 yards, and are only accurate 60 percent of the time.

Providing an address can mean the difference between life and death. A man in Grand Traverse County, the first in Michigan to introduce Smart911 in 2012, discovered this when fire struck his home. He was overcome with smoke and was unable to speak into his phone. The cellphone signal showed that his house was in the middle of the lake. But his Smart911 profile listed his address, which reduced the response time by an estimated 11 minutes, likely saving his life.

Other information that can be included in a profile includes:

- Access drives and entry points; gate combinations; lock box/key locations; medical equipment locations; and emergency utility shut-offs.
- Building floor plans and lists and locations of hazardous material.
- Linking phone numbers to specific addresses, such as schools, home and work places.
- Missing person identification and descriptions and photos.
- Emergency contacts and key holder information.

Organizations that work with people who are hearing-impaired, autistic or have other disabilities say that the Smart911 program has been helpful for their clients by alerting responders to their needs.

The Smart911 information on the secure site is only available to the participating 911 center when a 911 call is made. Users will receive reminders every six months to update their profile to keep information current.

Participants can also sign up to receive alerts about weather, Amber Alerts for missing children, and other announcements.

Smart911 profiles are only delivered to dispatch centers through voice calls. Callers that are hearing-impaired or in a situation where they can't speak out loud, such as a domestic violence call, are encouraged to use the county's Text-to-911 service.

Agens said the new technology will allow dispatchers to text after a hang-up call to determine if it is an actual emergency or a mistake. Centers have found that people are more likely to respond to a text than answer after

accidentally dialing 911. The Berrien centers will keep track of public participation to determine whether to continue the service after 18 months. Without state funding it will cost the county about \$36,000 a year to maintain Smart911, he said.

Information for residents is at:

[www.smart911.com](http://www.smart911.com) and  
[www.berriencounty.org/PublicSafety911Dispatch/Smart911](http://www.berriencounty.org/PublicSafety911Dispatch/Smart911).

Information for businesses, schools, commercial properties and institutions is at [www.smart911.com/corporateprofile/portal/about](http://www.smart911.com/corporateprofile/portal/about).

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