



TIPS FOR REPORTING CRIMES AND SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES

San Diego Police Department

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PREFACE

The SDPD is committed to working in a problem-solving partnership with individuals, community groups, and businesses, as well as with schools, hospitals, religious groups, private organizations, and other government agencies to fight crime and improve the quality of life for the people of San Diego. Problem solving is a key component in the Department's philosophy of Neighborhood Policing, which focuses on community crime and disorder problems and recognizes the need for close relationships between the police and other elements in the City to identify and solve problems. However, Neighborhood Policing cannot succeed on the efforts of the police alone. All elements of the City have responsibilities to fulfill.

Twelve community responsibilities are defined in a paper entitled *Community Responsibilities for Making Neighborhood Policing Work in San Diego: A Resource Guide for Individuals, Community Groups, and Businesses*. They are:

- Voicing concerns about disorder problems
- Employing crime prevention measures
- Knowing about crime and disorder in your community
- Addressing and solving certain community problems
- Volunteering services to police and other community groups
- Commenting on SDPD personnel performance in Neighborhood Policing
- Reporting crimes and suspicious activities
- Reporting suspicious person, activities, vehicles, etc. to prevent terrorism
- Reporting other problems and incidents
- Helping to convict and punish criminals
- Getting help with personal and family problems
- Exercising parental authority

The first six are discussed in that paper. The last six, including this one, are discussed in separate papers. They are published as part of the SDPD's continuing efforts to promote Neighborhood Policing. They provide information to help individuals, community groups, businesses, property owners, and others fulfill their responsibilities. All can be opened on the Community Resources and Responsibilities page of the SDPD website at www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/community.

INTRODUCTION

This paper contains tips for reporting crimes and suspicious activities, and providing crime information to the SDPD. Tips for reporting suspicious persons, activities, vehicles, etc. for terrorism prevention can be found by clicking on a file by that name on the Community Resources and Responsibilities page on the SDPD website at www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/community.

For reporting purposes, crimes and suspicious activities are considered as either emergencies or non-emergencies. Emergencies, i.e., situations that demand immediate attention, should be reported by calling **911**. Non-emergencies and suspicious activities should be reported to the SDPD by calling **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**, specific SDPD investigative units, or to other law enforcement agencies. Information about crimes committed in the City should be reported directly to the SDPD. Or you can call Crime Stoppers at **(888) 580-8477** if you don't want to get involved.

Persons witnessing and calling to report crimes are routinely asked for their names, addresses, and phone numbers. This is done so that they can be contacted later if necessary during the investigation of the crime. Witnesses desiring to remain anonymous should request that the officers responding to the call not contact them. Even if contacted later by a detective, the identity of the caller will not be revealed to anyone involved in the crime. In this sense, reports of crimes are treated as confidential and the identity of the caller is protected. However, if the case goes to trial, the report could be released to the prosecuting agency and under the rules of discovery, to the defense. It could also be subpoenaed in a civil trial. And you may be called to testify in court.

The ability of the police to locate and arrest criminals often depends on the thoroughness and accuracy of the report you submit. The following information checklist should be used for reporting both emergency and non-emergency crimes:

- Type of crime
- Location: exact street address and nearest cross street
- Time of occurrence
- Weapons used
- Number of persons injured and types of injuries
- Vehicle information: activity, direction of travel, license plate, color, make/model, unusual characteristics (e.g., dents, bumper stickers, graphics, wheels, tinted windows, lifted/lowered), cargo type/covering, number of persons, etc.
- Suspect information: activity, direction of escape, race, gender, age, height, weight, weapon type, hair (color, length, style, facial), clothing color and type (hat, tie, coat, shirt, trousers), other characteristics (e.g., tattoos, scars/marks, complexion, missing teeth, scars, glasses), etc.

EMERGENCIES

Emergencies include crimes that are in progress or about to happen, and ones that have resulted in serious personal injury, property damage, or property loss. They also include situations in which the suspect may still be at the scene and some suspicious activities. By calling **911** you will be linked to the appropriate police as well as fire fighting, medical, and ambulance services. You don't need money to call **911** from a pay phone.

When reporting an emergency be prepared to give an accurate description of what your emergency is and your location, especially if you are calling from a mobile cellular phone. Even if you have an E911-ready cell phone that provides location information based on a Global Positioning System (GPS) and your phone has been activated to work in that capacity, the emergency response will be faster if you provide your location. Otherwise the dispatcher can determine the street address and apartment or condo unit only if you are calling from a landline.

Thus, if a landline is available it is always better to use it instead of a cell phone. If you are calling from a gated community or a controlled-access building, be sure to give the dispatcher the gate or door access code. Answer the dispatcher's questions about the emergency and don't hang up until you are told. With just the address, if the line is disconnected or you cannot speak, an officer will still be dispatched.

911 calls on cellular phones have increased dramatically over time and are currently overloading the dispatchers who receive these calls. It is estimated that nearly 60 percent of these calls are either accidental or for non-emergencies. Time spent handling these calls prolongs response times for real emergencies. Accidental calls can be reduced by disabling the phone's auto-dial **911** feature. **911** calls other than those involving crimes should be limited to life-threatening situations to which emergency personnel have not yet responded. For example, a parked vehicle not blocking traffic lanes is not considered an emergency; it should be reported on a non-emergency line. Please make note of the non-emergency numbers, which are **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**, and add the appropriate one to your cellular phone directory.

Some examples of crime emergencies that should be reported by calling **911** are:

- Fights, sexual assaults, etc.
- Homicides
- Burglaries and robberies in progress
- Flashlight beam in a business or home, especially if the business is closed or the residents are away
- Domestic violence
- Child and elder abuse
- Sounds of gunshots, screaming, barking dogs, breaking glass, explosions, alarms, etc.
- Hit and run accidents with possible injuries
- Vehicles containing weapons or property not normally kept in vehicles
- Ongoing dumping of fuel or other hazardous substances
- Road hazards that require immediate attention to prevent personal injuries and property damage
- Graffiti and other acts of vandalism in progress
- Runaway juvenile or missing person who needs special care -- be sure to tell the dispatcher if the person needs medication and has a special problem, e.g., Alzheimer's disease

Persons seen doing the following should also be reported by calling **911**:

- Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Entering a neighbor's home when the neighbor is away
- Forcing an entry of a home, business, or vehicle
- Exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms that poses a threat to him/herself or others
- Removing property from a business, home, or vehicle, especially if the business is closed or the residents are away
- Carrying or wearing bloody clothing
- Struggling with a resisting child
- Trying to or actually using a vehicle to pick up a person by force, especially a child or female

Parents can use the following safety tips to teach their children the proper way to use **911** to report emergencies:

- Never say "nine eleven." There is no eleven on a telephone keypad or dial. Always say "nine-one-one."
- Always call from a safe place. If there is a fire in the house, get out first and then call.
- Post your address near the phone.
- Never call **911** as a prank or joke. You can get into trouble and keep someone who really needs help from getting it in time.
- **911** is not for animal emergencies. Call your vet or the County Department of Animal Control at **(619) 236-2341**.
- Call **911** if you think you have an emergency and explain the situation to the dispatcher.
- If you call **911** by mistake, don't hang up. Explain the mistake to the dispatcher and say there is no emergency.

NON-EMERGENCIES AND SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES

These can be reported to the SDPD or to the law enforcement agency with primary jurisdiction.

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The SDPD's 24-hour numbers for non-emergency calls and general information are **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. **Crimes and suspicious activities that fall into this category are: (a) those that don't involve serious personal injury, property damage, or property loss; (b) ones in which there is no possibility that the suspect is still at the scene or is likely to return to the scene; and (c) ones for which an immediate response is not needed.** Because the waiting times to talk to a dispatcher are long during the day, the best times to call are before 8:00 a.m. and after 8:00 p.m. If there is any doubt as to whether the situation is an emergency, it is always better to be on the safe side and call **911**.

The SDPD response to non-emergency calls will depend on the relative seriousness or priority of the situation, the likelihood of making an arrest at the scene, and the availability of an officer. Response times are the longest for so-called "cold crimes" like home burglaries where the perpetrator has fled the scene, no suspects exist, and the victim is in no further danger.

Some example situations that may not be emergencies are:

- Home and business burglaries in which the suspect is gone from the scene
- Open or broken doors or windows in businesses or homes, especially if the business is closed or the residents are away
- Stolen checks and credit cards -- also call the financial institutions involved to have them stop payments of checks and verifications of charges
- Impersonation and stolen identification, e.g., driver license
- Auto theft and vandalism
- Hit and run accidents with no injuries
- Minors violating curfew
- Loud parties
- Road hazards that don't require immediate attention
- Past instances of graffiti or other vandalism
- Past instances of child or elder abuse
- Runaway juvenile or missing adult who does not need special care
- Car or building alarms
- Underage drinking
- Accumulations of consumer goods, especially in good condition and not in use in homes, garages, and storage areas

Persons seen doing the following may not be emergencies:

- Disturbing the peace, i.e., loitering, panhandling, noise making, and harassing others
- Soliciting without a license, not displaying a valid registration card, or operating between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.
- Going door-to-door, or into side or back yards in a residential area
- Loitering near a business or home, especially if the business is closed or the residents are away
- Loitering near schools or parks
- Looking into parked vehicles
- Running other than for exercise
- Carrying property at an unusual time and place
- Entering and leaving property on daily or regular basis, or in large numbers, especially at night
- Drunk in public but not in any immediate danger
- Exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms but not a danger to themselves or others

- Offering goods for sale at ridiculously low prices
- Making a quick change of vehicles

Vehicles seen doing the following may not be emergencies:

- Moving slowly, especially without lights at night, in aimless or repetitive manner, or near schools or parks
- Parked and occupied at an unusual time or place
- Parked for more than 72 hours, possibly abandoned, or otherwise parked illegally on city streets
- Parked on city streets but cannot be operated safely thereon because of a missing part or piece of equipment
- Being dismantled or repaired, especially at night or in a parking lot, garage, or non-business location
- Being used for business transactions, especially near schools or parks
- Being driven in an erratic manner

You can report some non-emergency crimes on the SDPD's Citizens' Online Reporting System on its website at www.sandiego.gov/police/crimereports/startaccess under the following conditions:

- It's not an emergency. Call 911 if it is.
- You don't know who committed it and there's no evidence of who did.
- There's no physical, video, or digital evidence.
- Your identity, credit card, or debit card was not used without your authorization.
- You are not a victim because of your race, religion, sexual orientation, handicap, ethnicity, or national origin.
- The incident did not occur on a State highway or freeway
- You understand that filing a false report is a crime.
- The incident occurred within the San Diego city limits.
- The value or damage is less than \$5,000.
- You are 18 years of age or older.
- You have a valid e-mail address.

Crimes you can report online include harassing communications, lost property, theft, theft from vehicle, vandalism, vandalism of a vehicle, and vehicle tampering. Click on Submit on the first page if you answered "No" to the first five questions and "Yes" to the last four. On completing your report you will be given a temporary police report number and after submission and approval, which may involve modifying your submission to meet Department requirements, you'll be able to print a copy of the report for your records. If you fail to make the required modifications within seven days, the report will be invalidated.

If you observe multiple incidents at a particular location you can submit a Citizen Request Form by going to the Forms page on the SDPD website at www.sandiego.gov/police/forms/forms, clicking on Citizen Request Form, filling out the Form online with as much information as possible about the problem, and then clicking on the Submit Request button at the bottom of the Form. You can use this Form to request additional patrol and/or to report narcotic activity at a specific address. It will be sent to the responsible Division for review and response as appropriate.

You can also report non-emergency situations and suspicious activities directly to some investigative units during normal business hours if you have enough information for the unit to start an investigation. Units that will take calls directly are listed in the government pages of the phone book. Here are some other numbers that you can call.

- **Gangs.** Call **(619) 531-2847** to report threats by known gang members, gang activities, and gang-related graffiti. Call **(619) 531-2532**, the 24-hour gang hotline, to provide information on incidents of gang violence. Your call can be anonymous, or you can leave your name for a detective to call back.

- **Traffic.** Call **(858) 495-7800** regarding recurring violations of traffic laws at specific locations, e.g., speeding, running red lights and stop signs, etc. Because such violations are classified as infractions and must be witnessed by a police officer before any enforcement action can be taken, the SDPD cannot act on complaints of specific violations by an identified vehicle. However, in the case of misdemeanor violations, e.g., reckless driving and hit-and-runs, enforcement action can be taken if a private person witnesses the incident and can identify the driver or the license number of the vehicle.
- **Vehicle Abatement.** Call the SDPD Abandoned Vehicle Abatement (AVA) Unit at **(858) 495-7856** regarding abandoned, wrecked, dismantled, or inoperative vehicles or vehicle parts on private property (not yours) if they are not lawfully stored thereon. Call the SDPD at **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154** regarding any such vehicles or parts on city streets or public property. The vehicles will be inspected and steps will be taken to have them removed if they are in violation of the law.

You can also report some vehicle violations online. To report a vehicle that has been parked on a city street for more than 72 hours go to www.sandiego.gov/police/services/units/traffic/abandonedvehicle/72hr. And go to www.sandiego.gov/form/abandoned-vehicle-abatement-private-property-%E2%80%93-inoperable-vehicle-complaint to report an inoperable vehicle on private property that is visible from the street or alley.

- **Vice.** Call **(619) 531-2452** regarding prostitution, pornography, gambling, and violations of laws regulating police-licensed businesses, which include cabarets, card rooms, dance halls, massage parlors, "adult" entertainment establishments, swap meets, pawn shops, etc. For complaints against stores, bars, and restaurants that hold an Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) license and sell alcoholic beverages regarding sales -to minors, and vandalism, noise, loitering, litter, urination, rowdy behavior, etc. outside the establishments, call the Vice Unit ABC Hotline at **(619) 515-2777** or fill out a complaint form online at www.sandiego.gov/police/forms/alcohol.

Other Law Enforcement Agencies

Crimes and suspicious activities of which the SDPD does not have jurisdiction should be reported directly to the proper agency. An exception to this is when the crime is in progress when you should call **911**. The SDPD will notify the responsible agency. The phone numbers and jurisdictions of other law enforcement agencies for non-emergencies are given below:

- **California Highway Patrol.** Call **(858) 637-3800** to report highway non-emergencies such as accidents, parked vehicles not blocking traffic lanes, and graffiti on freeway signs, over-crossings, and bridge pillars. Use **911** to report highway emergencies such as reckless driving, hit and runs, and vehicles blocking traffic lanes.
- **FBI.** Call the San Diego Division at **(858) 320-1800** or submit a tip electronically at <https://tips.fbi.gov> if you have information about:
 - Possible acts of terrorism, including violence, funding, or recruitment
 - Persons sympathetic to terrorists or terrorist organizations
 - Suspicious activities that you believe threaten national security, especially suspicious activities that involve foreign powers or foreign organizations
 - Computer crimes or intrusions into computer networks, particularly those associated with national security;
 - Corrupt activities in state, local, or federal governments or in law enforcement
 - Racial or hate crimes, human trafficking (involuntary servitude or slavery), or other civil rights crimes
 - Organized crime activities
 - Financial crimes that involve fraud, especially corporate fraud, mortgage fraud, or other investment fraud schemes where significant dollar losses have occurred, including those impacting you or your place of work
 - Fraud in the health care industry
 - Persons who have committed or are planning to commit bank robbery, kidnapping, extortion, or thefts of valuable art, large interstate shipments of goods, or monetary instruments
 - Activities of violent gangs

- **San Diego Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program.** Call the *Storm Water Hotline* at **(619) 235-1000** to report dumping of fuel or other hazardous substances in city storm drains.
- **San Diego County Sheriff.** Call **(858) 565-5200** regarding non-emergency crimes that have occurred in the Sheriff jurisdiction areas. These are the cities of Del Mar, Encinitas, Imperial Beach, Lemon Grove, Poway, San Marcos, Santee, Solana Beach, and Vista, and the unincorporated areas of the County.
- **U.S. Customs and Border Protection.** Call **(800) 232-5378** regarding suspicious activities. Information about the San Diego sector is available on the Internet at **www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/border-patrol-sectors/san-diego-sector-california**.
- **U.S. Post Office.** Call the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) at **(877) 876-2455** to report stolen, opened, or rifled mail, mail fraud, telemarketing fraud involving mail, and other mail-related crimes. The USPIS has a standing reward offer of up to \$10,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone stealing mail or possessing stolen mail. Call **911** if you suspect a piece of mail is contaminated or contains an explosive. Otherwise do not handle or sniff it, and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Call the SDPD at **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154** about other pieces of suspicious mail.
- **U.S. Secret Service.** Call **(619) 557-5640** regarding threats to the President and other government officials, counterfeit money, forgery, identity crimes, computer fraud, and other financial crimes. For more information visit its website at **www.secretservice.gov**.

PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT CRIMES

Information about crimes committed in the City should be reported directly to the SDPD. Or if you don't want to get involved, you can call Crime Stoppers.

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To provide information about a crime that is under investigation, call the detective handling the case. If you do not know the detective's name, call your local SDPD Area Station and ask to speak with the detective assigned to the case. If the case is being handled by one of the central investigative units, you will be given the name and phone number of the detective to contact.

Generally the City does not pay rewards for information about crimes. However, a City ordinance authorizes the City Manager to pay a reward of up to \$500 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of graffiti vandals. Reward claim forms for this *Graffiti Spray and Pay Program* can be obtained online at **www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/street-div/services/graffiti/pdf/claim.pdf**. Complete the form and send it to: Office of the City Attorney Spray and Pay Program, 1200 Third Avenue, Suite 700, San Diego, CA 92101.

Crime Stoppers

Crime Stoppers is a citizen-operated, non-profit organization that works in partnership with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to help solve serious crimes. It gives community members an opportunity to fight crime without "getting involved." If you think you might have information concerning a serious crime or felony suspect, call toll free **(888) 580-8477**. This number can also be used by students, teachers, and parents to provide anonymous tips about safety concerns and potential problems at their schools. The operator on this 24-hour hotline will take your information and give you a code number. All calls remain confidential. If your information leads to an arrest you could earn a reward of up to \$1,000. The tip-line operator will explain how you can use your code number to give additional information and how to collect your reward. Or you can provide tips by text messaging from a cell phone to **274637** with **SDTips** at the beginning of the message. See the Crime Stoppers website at **www.sdcrimestoppers.com** for information on wanted fugitives, unsolved cases, bank robbers, etc.

You can also provide tips from TipSoft by Public Engines on its website at **www.tipsubmit.com**. Web, mobile, or text tips submitted from it are encrypted, entirely confidential, and completely anonymous.

They are immediately and securely transferred directly to Crime Stoppers that use the TipSoft Tip-Management application.

Crime Stoppers also has a special program with the San Diego Unified School District in which students can receive cash rewards of up to \$1000 for tips or information that solve or prevent campus violence or vandalism to school property. These calls should also go to **(888) 580-8477**.

SDPD AREA STATIONS

Central	2501 Imperial Ave. SD 92102	(619) 744-9500
Eastern	9225 Aero Dr. SD 92123	(858) 495-7900
Mid-City	4310 Landis St. SD 92105	(619) 516-3000
Northeastern	13396 Salmon River Rd. SD 92129	(858) 538-8000
Northern	4275 Eastgate Mall SD 92037	(858) 552-1700
Northwestern	12592 El Camino Real SD 92130	(858) 523-7000
Southeastern	7222 Skyline Dr. SD 92114	(619) 527-3500
Southern	1120 27th St. SD 92154	(619) 424-0400
Western	5215 Gaines St. SD 92110	(619) 692-4800