



Date: Jan. 7/12

Subject: Media Release

Pocket Dials/Unintentional 9-1-1 Calls Putting Public at Risk

Police Say Unintentional Calls from Mobile Devices is a Growing problem in Ontario

(Perth, ON) - Police services across Ontario are seeing an increase in pocket dialed and unintentional 9-1-1 calls, which represent a serious threat to public safety and negatively impact police resources according to the Ontario 9-1-1 Advisory Board (OAB) and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP).

“The use of mobile devices are increasing and so are the unintentional 9-1-1 calls known as pocket dials,” said Chief Pat Capello. “When we receive unintentional 911 calls at our communication center, we must follow up on the call to determine its validity. This becomes a drain on our resources and creates a public safety issue”.

Pocket dials happen when a keypad on a mobile device carried in a pocket, purse, backpack etc is accidentally pressed. Unintentional 9-1-1 calls are generated from a mobile device and are not intended as emergency calls.

Unintentional 9-1-1 calls tie up phone lines that deliver 9-1-1 calls to Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), which handle 9-1-1 calls. This negatively impacts a PSAP’s ability to respond to real emergencies.

The Ontario 9-1-1 Advisory Board brings together police personnel to act as advocates for the 9-1-1 system in the Province of Ontario. OAB is partnering with the Ontario Chiefs of Police (OACP) to raise public awareness of the unintentional/pocket dialed calls.

The OAB and OACP have found that hundreds of unintentional/pocket dialed 9-1-1 calls are being received daily by police services across Ontario from cell phones and other devices where no emergency exists. For example:

- The Perth Police Service received 278 calls to 9-1-1 in 2011. The majority of calls were not valid emergencies, approximately 76% of the calls. Pocket dials accounted for 19% of the false calls.

For every unintentional/pocket 9-1-1 call received, a 9-1-1 emergency communicator must determine whether an emergency exists. Every second counts when someone is waiting for an emergency communicator to pick up a 9-1-1 call and dispatch police, emergency medical services, or fire.

“Citizens have the power to stop unintentional 9-1-1 calls from their mobile devices. It could be as simple as locking a key pad or putting the device in stand-by mode,” said Chief Matt Torigian, President of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. “Such actions do not impact a user’s ability to receive a phone call, but may significantly reduce the chance of a pocket dial. To further reduce the pocket dial risk, users should not program 9-1-1 into their devices and should prevent small children from playing with such devices.”

Someone who places an unintentional 9-1-1 call should stay on the line. Every 9-1-1 call is taken seriously. When a 9-1-1 caller doesn’t respond, that could be a sign of trouble – a possibility an emergency responder can’t ignore. Users are urged to let the emergency operator know it was a pocket dial/unintentional call. This will eliminate the need for the emergency operator to call back to determine if there is a legitimate emergency, saving precious seconds and allowing them to move on to the next emergency call.

Citizens can prevent pocket dials or unintentional 9-1-1 calls by:

- Locking keypads using the keypad lock feature. Keypad locks, some of which can be programmed to activate automatically, prevent a mobile device from responding to keystrokes until the user unlocks the keypad using a short combination of key presses.
- Turn off the 9-1-1 auto dial feature, if your mobile device has one. To determine whether a device has this feature and how to turn it off, check the user manual or the manufacturer’s website, or call the service provider.
- Refrain from programming a wireless device to speed or automatically dial 9-1-1.