Wheatland Emergency Response

Moving to Calgary 9-1-1: Citizens Fact Sheet

Will moving to Calgary 9-1-1 cause delays in emergency response?

No. When you call 9-1-1, you won't notice any difference. Your call will be answered, and help will be sent just as quickly as it is today.

Here's how it works behind the scenes: When you dial 9-1-1, your call is automatically connected to Calgary 9-1-1. As soon as a call taker begins talking with you and gathering details about your emergency, a dispatcher is already passing that same information along to the fire crews heading your way, using radio and computer systems at the same time. In other words, help is being arranged while you're still on the phone, so no time is lost.

This "answer and dispatch at the same time" approach is recognized as the gold standard in emergency services. It means you get someone's full attention on the phone while first responders get what they need to reach you.

How will Calgary 9-1-1 know local location names, landmarks, and community-specific references?

This is a common and very fair question, and the short answer is that Calgary 9-1-1 has several layers working together to pinpoint your location.

First, they use a detailed digital mapping system built right into their dispatch software. This map data comes directly from local municipalities, so community names, roads, and key locations are already loaded in. It's also continually improved with input from first responders who know the area firsthand.

Second, technology helps locate you in the moment. When you call from a cell phone, the system can pull GPS data to estimate your location. When you call from a landline, your phone provider supplies the address tied to that line, which is shared with the 9-1-1 centre the moment you call.

In rural and smaller communities, the approach is to combine the two: technology gives the call taker an approximate location, which is paired with the on-the-ground knowledge of the local first responders being dispatched. So even if you describe a place by a name only locals would use, the crew responding will recognize it.

How will Calgary 9-1-1 determine when and how to send local responders?

Calgary 9-1-1 uses dispatch software with detailed response plans built into it ahead of time. These plans specify which crews and equipment should be sent for different types of emergencies, so the right help is automatically matched to the situation.

That software works hand in hand with the mapping system and your location information (from your cell phone or landline) to figure out where you are and which local resources are closest and best suited to respond. Putting those pieces together means the most appropriate crew is on its way to you as quickly as possible.

How will Calgary 9-1-1 handle rural addresses and legal land descriptions?

Rural properties are often identified by legal land descriptions, range roads, or township and section numbers rather than a typical street address, and that's fully accounted for.

Calgary 9-1-1's mapping system is loaded with location data supplied directly by the municipality, which includes rural addressing for this area. On top of that, the local first responders who know the area are part of every response, so a property described by its quarter-section, range road, or a well-known local reference can be located and reached.

Does Calgary 9-1-1 have experience dispatching rural fire departments?

Yes, and quite a lot of it. Calgary 9-1-1 has been dispatching for rural fire departments more than 20 years, so handling the unique situations and specific needs that come with rural response is not new to them; it's a core part of what they do every day.

Today, Calgary 9-1-1 already dispatches for 11 rural fire departments and communities:

- Rocky View County
- Beiseker
- Crossfield
- Chestermere
- Redwood Meadows
- Tsuut'ina First Nation
- Stoney Nakoda First Nation
- Cochrane
- Municipal District of Bighorn (Exshaw, Jamieson, and Ghost River/Benchlands)
- Canmore
- Kananaskis County

In short, your community would be joining a well-established service with nearly two decades of experience in rural firefighting and as a 911 service provider.

Does Calgary 9-1-1 have experience dispatching volunteer and paid-on-call firefighters?

Yes. Most of the rural departments Calgary 9-1-1 already dispatches for are volunteer or paid-on-call departments, so they understand how this model works and what it takes to support it.

They also recognize something important about volunteer and paid-on-call crews: the number of firefighters available can change from one moment to the next, depending on who's able to respond. To account for that, dispatchers follow response plans that automatically bring in help from neighbouring departments when needed (often called "mutual aid"), so a fire gets a timely response even when the local crew is stretched.

Calgary 9-1-1 also coordinates the equipment side of things, making sure the right trucks and apparatus are dispatched for the situation.

The goal throughout is simple: the right resources arriving at the right time, to keep both firefighters and residents safe.

Will Calgary 9-1-1 cost more per capita than other dispatch providers?

Calgary 9-1-1 submitted its per-capita costs as part of a formal, competitive bidding process (an RFP, or Request for Proposals). Because the bids submitted by other providers are confidential to that process, we're not able to publish a side-by-side cost comparison between providers.

What we can tell you is that the decision wasn't made behind closed doors. Cost was one of the factors weighed through an open, competitive process, and the results were presented publicly at council meetings, on camera, so residents could see how the decision was reached.

If you'd like to review the cost information that was shared, it's part of the public record from council meetings.

How was Calgary 9-1-1 selected as the dispatch provider?

Wheatland County chose its dispatch provider through a Request for Proposals, or RFP. That's a formal, competitive process in which interested providers submit detailed proposals, and each is evaluated against the same set of standards.

The choice wasn't based on cost alone. Proposals were weighed on a range of factors:

- **Cost** – the price of the service to the community
- **Technology capability and readiness** – whether the provider has the right tools in place and ready to go
- **Redundancy capability and readiness** – backup systems that keep service running if something fails, so calls are never left unanswered

In short, Calgary 9-1-1 was selected because it offered the strongest overall combination of value, capability, and reliability through a fair and competitive review.

Does moving to Calgary 9-1-1 mean EMS units will respond from Calgary?

No. The way ambulances are dispatched in Wheatland County is not changing at all.

Ambulances (EMS) are not dispatched by Calgary 9-1-1. They're dispatched by Alberta Health Services through its Emergency Health Services (EHS) division, and that stays exactly the same. Moving fire dispatch and 9-1-1 call answering to Calgary 9-1-1 has no effect on which ambulances respond or where they come from.

Here's how a medical call works: when you dial 9-1-1, the call is answered at the 9-1-1 centre, where a trained operator asks what your emergency is. If it's a medical situation, they transfer you straight to Alberta Health Services' EMS dispatch, who take over from there. That hand-off works the same way it does today.

The only thing changing is who answers your very first 9-1-1 call. Everything about how ambulances are dispatched and where they come from stays the same.

Will fire departments still be dispatched to support medical calls within their fire district?

Yes. Your fire department will continue to be dispatched to support medical calls exactly as it is today. Nothing about that changes.

This matters in rural communities, where firefighters often arrive first and provide important help while an ambulance is on its way. That role continues just as it does now.

When does this change take effect, and is there anything I need to do?

When the change will take place is still TBD. There's nothing you need to do to prepare.

The most important thing stays exactly the same: in an emergency, you still call **9-1-1**. The number doesn't change, your phone doesn't change, and you don't need to save any new numbers. The only difference is behind the scenes, in who answers and coordinates the call, and that's built to be seamless for you.

If Calgary 9-1-1 calls me back, how will I know it's really them?

If your call to 9-1-1 is cut off, whether from an accidental hang-up, a dropped signal, or any other reason, Calgary 9-1-1 may call you back to make sure you're safe and to get any information they still need.

When they do, your phone will display **"Calgary 911"** as the caller. That way, you'll know the call is genuine and should be answered, even if the number itself is unfamiliar.

So, if you ever see "Calgary 911" on your screen, please pick up. It means someone is checking to make sure help reaches you.

Calgary 9-1-1 serves a large city. Will our rural call wait behind city calls during a busy time?

No. Your call won't be put in line behind a city's worth of calls.

Calgary 9-1-1 is staffed and structured to handle high call volumes around the clock, and calls are managed based on urgency, not on where they come from. A rural emergency is treated with the same priority as any other.

What happens if the Calgary 9-1-1 centre has a problem, a power outage or system failure?

Calgary 9-1-1 service is built so that a single failure never leaves your call unanswered. This is the "redundancy" that was a key requirement in selecting the provider.

Calgary 9-1-1 has backup systems and the ability to continue operating during power, technology, or facility disruptions, ensuring emergency calls are answered and dispatched. For example, as part of its redundancy capabilities, C9-1-1 operates two centers simultaneously, serving as a backup in the case one facility becomes inoperable.

How do I contact my fire department for non-emergencies, such as burn permits or general questions?

For non-emergencies, the new number will be 403-264-1022 for routine matters such as burn permits, fire bans, or general inquiries.

Who do I contact if I have a question or concern before or after the change?

If you have questions or concerns about 9-1-1 or fire dispatch service, you can reach out to the County or applicable Village Office. Your feedback is welcome.

Village of Standard
Yvette April
Chief Administrative Officer
Phone: (403) 644-3968

Village of Hussar:
Liz Santerre
Chief Administrative Officer
Phone: (403) 787-3766

Village of Rockyford
Lori Miller
Chief Administrative Officer
Phone: (403) 533-3950

Wheatland County
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