



## History of 9-1-1 in the US

### Happy Birthday 9-1-1!

Forty-four years ago, February 16, 1968 at 2:00 PM local time...the first 9-1-1 call was made in Haleyville, Alabama launching the first generation of 9-1-1. Today, more than 240 million 9-1-1 calls are made each day. The nation's 9-1-1 system has endured and survived many changes and challenges. Steve Souder, Director of Fairfax County, Virginia Department of 9-1-1/ Public Safety Communications, said: "Forty-four years later there's much talk about Next Generation 9-1-1. However, three constants have never change....9-1-1 the number, the caller and YOU!"



### World's First 9-1-1 Call

Haleyville, AL - February 16, 1968

*The following is a brief recount of the events surrounding the placing of the nation's first 9-1-1 call.*

Before Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, (June 2, 1875) public safety was served by town criers. A town crier would walk the streets of a town and cry out for help in emergency situations. In the 1950's, independent telephone companies were very common in the United States. If you wanted the police, you dialed the police station. If you had a fire, you called the fire department. If you needed any emergency help, you dialed the individual you needed, or you could dial "0" and get the operator. Then he or she would ring the persons you were calling for. In 1958, Congress called for a universal emergency number. At this time, the President's Commission of Law Enforcement and the F.C.C. started arguing over a single easy to remember number. This was due to the large volume of emergency calls going to telephone company operators. A person may be calling for emergency help while the operator was giving information on the number of Aunt Betsy in Louisiana or Uncle Charles in Oklahoma, which lead to delays in emergency responses. Telephone companies were facing the problem of how to separate emergencies from general

business. For over ten years the idea was discussed and argued about among the different agencies who wanted to receive the calls. Police said they should answer all calls, the Fire Department felt they were the better choice, some even felt the local hospital was the best answer. According to a report in the Fayette, Alabama Times Record commemorating the 25th anniversary of the historic event, B.W. Gallagher, President of Alabama Telephone Company, said he was inspired by an article

in the Wall Street Journal. He read that the president of AT&T and the FCC had announced that 9-1-1 would be the nationwide emergency number. Being a bit offended by the fact that the views of the independent telephone industry had been overlooked in this decision, Gallagher decided to make the Alabama Telephone Company the first to implement 9-1-1. Gallagher consulted with Robert Fitzgerald, inside plant manager for the Alabama Telephone Company, who examined schematics of the company's 27 exchanges. Fitzgerald chose Haleyville because its existing equipment was best suited to be quickly converted to receive 9-1-1 calls. Fitzgerald then designed the circuitry and installed the first 9-1-1 system in less than a week. Working with Fitzgerald to achieve this goal were technicians Pete Gosa, Jimmy White, Al Bush and Glenn Johnston. In the early stages, the city fathers were skeptical of 9-1-1 calls being answered at the police station. They, like persons in Congress, were afraid that the city might not have the personnel qualified to answer "all out emergency calls". Haleyville, Alabama introduced the nation's first 9-1-1 system which was located at the police station. Alabama Speaker of the House, Rankin Fite, made the first call from another city hall room. It was answered by Congressman Tom Bevill on a bright red telephone located in the police department. Also on hand was Haleyville Mayor James Whitt, Public Service Commission President Eugene (Bull) Connor, and B. W. Gallagher.

So on February 16, 1968, the first 9-1-1 call was made.

## The History of 9-1-1 Emergency Calls

### Who Designed and Installed the First US 9-1-1 System?

*"The race to be first will always be part of human nature as long as a bridge remains to be crossed, mountains to be climbed, or a telephone exchange to be cut-over, with a team working together as Alabama Telephone had."*



**B.W. (Bob) Gallagher** - President of the Alabama Telephone Company a subsidiary of Continental Telephone. Initiated and directed the overall 9-1-1 effort.

**Robert (Bob) Fitzgerald** - Inside State Plant Manager. Designed and engineered the needed circuitry for the first U.S. 9-1-1 system.

**Jimmy White** - Technician on 9-1-1 installation team.

**Glenn Johnston** - Technician on 9-1-1 installation team.

**Al Bush** - Technician on 9-1-1 installation team.

**Pete Gosa** - Technician on 9-1-1 installation team.

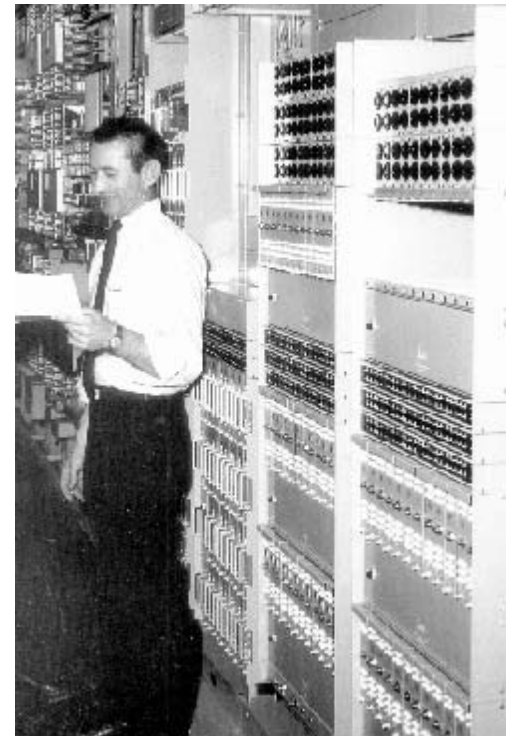
The ability to dial a single number to report emergencies was first used in Great Britain, in 1937. The British could dial 999 to call for police, medical or fire departments, from anywhere in the country. In 1958, the American Congress first investigated a universal emergency number for the United States and finally passed the legal

mandate in 1967. The very first American 9-1-1 call was placed on February 16, 1968 in Haleyville, Alabama made by Alabama Speaker of the House, Rankin Fite and answered by Congressman Tom Bevell.

The new emergency number had to be three numbers that were not in use in the United States or Canada as the first three numbers of any phone number or area code, and the numbers had to be easy to use. The Federal Trade Commission along with AT&T (which held a monopoly on phone services at that time) originally announced the plans to build the first 9-1-1 system in Huntington, Indiana. Bob Gallagher, President of the Alabama Telephone, was annoyed that the independent phone industry had not been consulted. Gallagher decided to beat AT&T to the punch line and have the first 9-1-1 emergency service built in Haleyville, Alabama.

Gallagher consulted with Bob Fitzgerald, his state inside-plant manager. Fitzgerald

let Gallagher know that he could do it. Gallagher moved quickly getting approvals from Continental Telephone and the Alabama Public Service commissioner, and releasing a press release on February 9 announcing that the Alabama Telephone Company would be making history.



Fitzgerald examined all twenty-seven Alabama exchanges choosing the Haleyville location, and then engineered the new circuitry and made the modifications needed for the existing equipment. Fitzgerald and his team worked around the clock to install the first 9-1-1 emergency system in under one week. The team worked their regular day jobs in Fayette, traveling each night to Haleyville to do the 9-1-1 work during off-peak hours. The work was completed on February 16, 1968, at exactly 2 p.m. celebrated with a team cheer of "Bingo!"