

Cellular calls help police nab lawbreakers

Police say call 911 for bad driver spottings

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Suppose you're zipping along I-75 in Troy, I-696 in Southfield or Telegraph in Bloomfield Hills and you see a motorist speeding dangerously or driving erratically, possibly drunk.

What do you do? Who do you call?

The answer, according to many area police agencies is 911.

A motorist at Grand River and Middlebelt called that number Wednesday to report somebody who appeared to have a shotgun and was driving erratically, said police Chief William J. Dwyer.

"We sent a unit out and eventually arrested the man for driving while intoxicated and a weapons violation," he said.

In this case, the caller went one step further. Dwyer said, and did something police do not advise motorists to do. After calling 911 to report the erratic driver, this motorist followed the suspect car until police caught up.

"In this case," said Dwyer, "following the car really helped. But we don't advise motorists to do that. Making the call is the big help."

Last year when Troy police

■ **'We do not want people who call (us) to then start following the erratic driver.'**

*Lt. Ronald Lapp
—State police commander*

Chief Lawrence R. Carey and his wife Betty saw a car go over the curb along Maple Road, they used their cellular phone to call the nonemergency number in Troy — 624-3477 — to summon police.

He knew the nonemergency number to call. People who don't know shouldn't let that stop them, Carey said.

"Some people might be reluctant to use that emergency number for a traffic incident," Carey said. "But 911 works just fine."

Knowing the number of the local police might be more effective than calling 911, Carey said. "But if somebody doesn't know the local number, 911 will work."

Cellular calls to 911 are handled by the Michigan State Police or the Oakland County Sheriff's Department. They route the call to the appropriate police agency which in turn can dispatch a squad car.

It was such a call last May

that prompted Oxford police to stop the 1991 Buick being driven by State Sen. Mat J. Dunaskias, R-Lake Orion.

A man from Metamora used his cellular phone to complain the car was driving along M-24 in an erratic manner.

When police stopped the car, Dunaskias was admittedly rude to the officer who stopped him, he acknowledged later in a released statement. But at the intersection of Police Chief Gary Ford, Dunaskias was given a ride home.

Dunaskias, who was returning from an annual golf outing, denied he had been drinking excessively. He did, however, admit drinking two beers and taking medication.

The cellular call last May didn't result in an arrest or ticket. But it did remove from the road somebody who later acknowledged he shouldn't have been driving.*

And getting erratic drivers off the road is the goal, according to Lt. Ronald J. Lapp, commander of the Michigan State Police post in Pontiac.

"We appreciate those kinds of calls," he said. "They (cellular callers) greatly expand our eyes and our ears."

Calling police is enough, Lapp said.

"We do not want people who call to then start following the erratic driver," he said. "Then we might have two cars traveling at excessive speed instead of one."

Furthermore, a motorist who calls to report a speeding or erratic driver doesn't have any immunity. So if the caller starts speeding after a bad driver, he or she might get stopped for speeding, Lapp said.

West Bloomfield Police Chief Ronald Cronin said his department normally gets cellular calls on a daily basis — a sharp contrast to five years ago when such calls were rare. "Obviously more people have cellular phones," he said, "and more people are becoming aware they can just

HOW IT WORKS



Despite the taboo sometimes associated with calling 911 in a non-emergency situation, local police officials urge drivers to use the number if they spot someone driving erratically or speeding down the road.

- When a cellular caller calls 911, the call is handled by the Michigan State Police or the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.
- They then route the call to the appropriate police agency which in turn can dispatch a squad car. Cellular phone owners should use nonemergency police numbers if they're known, but 911 will serve the same purpose, police say.
- Police do not advise following the driver until they get there. Doing so would only result in two erratic drivers, instead of just one.

call 911." Police would prefer the caller to give his or her name, Cronin said. "But that isn't necessary. Sometimes people don't want to

get involved, so we don't require that they give their name. "The information can be just as valid without the caller being identified," Cronin said.

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