

County tries to teach youths about 911

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WOOD RIVER - Madison County officials once again are educating youths about its emergency telephone system.

Deanna Roggio, the county's E-911 educational program coordinator, is visiting classrooms to stress three points.

"When to make a 911 call, how to make the call and, importantly, what to do after the 911 call has been made," Roggio said.

In 2008, Madison County telecommunicators handled nearly 140,000 calls at 16 public safety answering points. The number of 911 calls made each year by children is increasing.

"The more children know about 911, the better," Roggio said.

Several years ago, the county had instituted the educational program, which even included a 911 Store at Alton Square, where safety information was available.

As a member of the county's 911 team, Roggio said she cannot stress enough the importance of parents and teachers making sure children know how to use the 911 system.

"It's not just for medical emergencies, but for those, hopefully, rare occasions when a child feels - or is - threatened," she said.

She said educating children about the 911 emergency telephone system has been made simpler by the increased availability of cellular telephones and children's early introduction to technology.

"Cell phones have become commonplace," she said. "Last year, more than 65 percent of the calls to Madison County 911 were made on cell phones, and to children, using a cell phone is not a big deal."

In many cases, parents give their pre-teen children cell phones to use in case of an emergency, Roggio said.

"Preschool-age children play with hand-held computer games, and adapting to new technology is almost routine, so calling 911 is not that difficult," she said.

As part of the program, children are given coloring books, pencils and other items designed to help in the educational process and reinforce the 911 message.

"If the kids enjoy the 911 educational process, the more likely they will remember what to do if they ever have to call 911," Roggio said.

Some of the information children learn is that depending on the type of telephone used, they may need to be aware of special safety tips to ensure that telecommunicators can get the correct information. They learn that you can call 911 from a home, business, cell phone, or by one connected through broadband Internet or cable television.

Traditional telephone services provide 911 with enhanced information that includes the caller's address and telephone number, which automatically appear on the emergency operator's screen. Some newer telephone technologies, such as cell phones, Internet and cable-based phones, may not provide all the enhanced 911 features.

Roggio said the program makes sure that children ask adults what type of telephone service they are using at home. Depending on the service, she said children need to know the address from where the call is being made.

She said other tips about calling also are given to students.

Once the classroom portion of the program is done, students can take a tour of the county's 911 Center, 101 E. Edwardsville Road, Wood River.

"Some educators may want to follow up the classroom presentation with a tour of our facility," Roggio said. "The tour of the county's 911 emergency telephone center helps reinforce the message we present in the classroom. The kids can see for themselves how every call we receive is treated with the utmost importance, and it leaves an impression."