



## QUOTATIONS from Emergency Responders, Public Officials, And Independent Analysts On the Value of 2-1-1 in Times of Disaster

### **2009 Ice Storms, Arkansas**

"People who lack the resources for debris removal, repair of storm-damage to utilities, home repairs, utilities or food are finding that a call to 2-1-1 may connect them to the help they need. The 2-1-1 line has made a huge difference for disaster victims in our state."

-- *State Coordinating Officer Rich Griffin, Arkansas Department of Emergency Management*

### **2007 Wildfires, Southern California**

"The 2-1-1 service was an invaluable resource during the firestorm in that it freed up calls from 9-1-1. We could give information on repopulated neighborhoods to the 2-1-1 operators. We saw 9-1-1 calls diminish over time because of that."

-- *San Diego Undersheriff Bill Gore*

"Last year, the County added disaster response to 2-1-1's arsenal of services. We are extremely grateful that we did. During the first week of the fires, 2-1-1 answered more than 110,000 calls and had nearly 450,000 hits on its web site. Firestorm 2007 made clear that 2-1-1 can be invaluable to the people of this region".

-- *Chairman Greg Cox, San Diego County Board of Supervisors*

"I was in the 2-1-1 call center during the first hours of the fire and saw firsthand how quickly 2-1-1 San Diego was able to ramp up and take on the critical role of keeping citizens informed during the wildfires. 2-1-1 has become the centerpiece of our region's communications system, providing critical health and community information to people who need it."

-- *Ibid.*

"Since 2-1-1 began service, the number of inappropriate calls to 9-1-1 has gone down at least 25%."

-- *William Lansdowne, Chief of Police, City of San Diego*

*June 2007 presentation to the San Diego Association of Governments Public Safety Committee*

### **2005 Hurricanes Katrina and Rita**

[We] encourage states to establish a 2-1-1 telephone system from which victims can get shelter information, where [Disaster Response Centers] are, what the hours are, locations and telephone numbers."

-- *FEMA, 2005 Hurricane Season After-Action Report*

"2-1-1 is the mental health hub and pulse of this area...2-1-1 has been instrumental in saving the sanity and lives of many who are struggling to find their way through this mess."

-- *Cecile Tebo, Crisis Unit Coordinator, New Orleans Police Department*  
*Several months following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005*

### **2004 Hurricanes, Florida**

"It was absolutely beneficial to have 2-1-1. Without it, it would have been a lot more difficult for our citizens. But we need to have a recognized, official 2-1-1 function within emergency preparation and management plans. 2-1-1 needs to be officially designated as a major player so they have the possibility of being funded the way they should be."

-- *Don Lusk, Assistant County Manager in Brevard County*

"They were phenomenal. They are true 'call-takers,' the first line of information. They were there faithfully for hours on end. The first three days were largely emergency calls, ranging from out-of-town family members looking for loved ones to residents needing info on food, water, where to go for help, etc. The I&R staff handled it all so professionally, with compassion and sensitivity.

"The initial information needed to come in accurately for us to be able to help. Having them here alleviated the pressure on me. They didn't need my guidance. Joy [I&R Director] ran her operation. If I was assigned to prepare a first point of contact, a phone information unit in the event of a crisis, my first call would be to Joy and her team. In my opinion, a trained team of call-takers is the first and many times one of the most important lines of communication immediately following a crisis.

"That bank of phones was an extremely important area of the EOC immediately following the storm. Many people needed to hear a voice at the other end. It was amazing that they were trained call-takers, trained to listen and to hear not only what's being said but what's not being said. The stress level for them was unbelievable, the same as for 911 operators. They went above and beyond."

-- *Dale Phillips, Office of the Sheriff, Charlotte County*

"The idea was to take the load off of 911. We knew how to set up the hotline but the question was how to staff it. We never realized how well [the partnership with 2-1-1] would work out for both sides. We got trained call takers who knew how to deal with people and a core staff who were being paid to be there. It worked out excellently for us.

"We have never had a storm hit this county with both its front end and back end. It was so severe that we kept the hotline open for a week. We couldn't have done it with county employees. United Way 2-1-1 really stuck with it.

"It was good to have 2-1-1 here with us. We could provide generator back-up, computers, Internet access, food and it is the place where information flows in to.

"We estimated that 2-1-1 got 60,000 calls that normally would have gone to 911, freeing those operators to handle emergency calls."

-- *Matt Recommier, 9-1-1 Coordinator for Lee County*

2-1-1 "allow[ed] us to separate out many of the calls for social services. That freed up the calls coming into the 911 center so we could keep our lines as open as possible. 2-1-1 proved to be critical to us in our response to a natural disaster.

"The partnership really worked. We involved the Heart of Florida United Way [host organization for 2-1-1] in many of our press briefings as a way to promote 2-1-1 as an option for people to call. While people may not remember the specific list of phone numbers that are announced, they can remember 2-1-1."

-- *Jerry Demings, Director of Public Safety for Orange County*

"Staff in our Emergency Information Center were glad to have [2-1-1 staff] there because they could handle calls from people who were emotionally upset."

-- *Paul Milleli, Director of Public Safety in Palm Beach County*

### **2001 Terrorist Attacks, Washington, DC**

"Several major points emerge from this assessment of how dislocated hotel workers fared in the Washington, D.C. region following September 11. First, philanthropic givers, social-service organizations and government agencies—most notably unemployment agencies—responded quickly to the crisis and provided critical assistance to workers who were laid off or whose hours were cut. Second, workers seeking assistance nevertheless had to navigate an uncoordinated and often confusing array of social service providers. This confusion somewhat reduced the effectiveness of the region's emergency assistance network. At the same time, these glitches also underscore this paper's third major observation: that setting up a "211" system may be an important agenda item for the region's social-services community. In sum, improving the regional information and referral network by instituting a region-wide 211 telephone number and referral system in the Washington, D.C.-area could greatly improve the accessibility of services for residents in a future emergency as well as in ordinary times."

-- *The Brookings Institution and The Urban Institute, Calling 211: Enhancing the Washington Region's Safety Net After 9/11*