

## 'IT'S NOT A CLICHE. SECONDS MATTER' — LIVE911 SOFTWARE LOWERS BEND POLICE RESPONSE TIMES

By Morgan Owen  
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The Bend Police Department's average response time for a 911 call is 10 minutes, but a lot can happen in 10 minutes. A drunken driver could cause a crash and kill someone. A person might decide to take her or his own life. An armed robbery could turn fatal.

"It's not a cliché. Seconds really do matter," said Lt. Brian Beekman from the Bend Police Department. "I saw that very early in my career. I'll drive past a location and drive for three, four minutes in the opposite direction. Then, I'll get dispatched to an emergency at the location I was just at but didn't know something was going on."

Live911 — new software that allows officers to listen in to 911 calls within a 1-mile radius of their patrol cars — has changed that, cutting some response times down to seconds instead of minutes.

"We can completely reinvent what (emergency response) looks like with a tool like this," Beekman said. "It's really impressive stuff when you start to pair it up with an emergency situation and how important gaining 30 seconds is."

With a little bit of training, officers can install the software on their work phones. The parameters for the types of calls and at what radius around their phone's GPS are selected and officers are ready to hit the streets. Then, when a 911 call comes through, the live audio is accessible in real time through the software — officers can hear the call at the same time as the 911 dispatcher, rather than waiting for instructions to be relayed over the 911 radio dispatch system. All told, it costs Bend Police approximately \$10,000 a year to gain access to the software.

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### Not everyone was convinced at first

The Bend Police Department began testing and implementing Live911 in 2023 after Beekman and some other officers saw the software used in action by a Southern California police department. When they brought the tool back to Oregon, the Bend Police Department became the first law enforcement agency in the state to begin using the Live911 tool.

When Bend Police first approached Deschutes County 911 about implementing the system, there was some "natural apprehension" about allowing other people to listen in on 911 calls, said Deschutes County 911 Operations Manager Chris Perry. As a compromise, Perry agreed to work with Bend Police on implementing the system on the understanding that officers would only listen in to law-enforcement type calls.

"The partnership between 911 and Bend PD is a close and healthy one," Perry said. "We're willing to innovate with new technology to ultimately increase public safety, so I think it's been really great."



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Deschutes County 911 wasn't the only one Beekman had to convince. Officers inside the police department, too, were skeptical about how well a nascent technology like this could work.

"I wanted to kind of see how it would go. I didn't really know if it would help a lot at first, but then when I sat down and I logged on and I used it ... you realize how great this program is," Officer Joel Sandles told The Bulletin.

### **Saving lives within months**

Sandles has since become the police department's most avid user of the software, and believes that tools like this are going to propel law enforcement agencies into the future. He has even used Live911 to stop someone in the middle of an assault in downtown Bend earlier this year, arriving on the scene "probably before dispatch was even done getting the information."

"That is an amazing thing. If there was a gun involved ... to be able to have officers there within a minute could have immediately made changes as far as people getting hurt and handling the situation very quickly and safely," Sandles said.

For Beekman though, one of the most memorable uses of the system came just a few months after it was implemented. On Jan. 29 at 8:14 p.m., a Live911 call for a domestic dispute was routed to an officer in the field. The officer immediately drove to the area and arrived at 8:18 p.m., one minute after being officially dispatched to the scene. What officers didn't know was that the original 911 caller had left the area without knowing the dispute had escalated to a suicide attempt.

"I was told by the on-scene supervisor that if the officers had not intervened and provided medical care, the person would not have survived their self-inflicted injuries," Beekman said. "When I heard that, I thought, we bought a software tool that saved someone's life within a few months of us using it. That's worth every dollar amount, let alone \$10,000 a year."