



Newsletter
Spring Edition 2025



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IN THIS ISSUE ...

Calling 911	2
May Is Mental Health Awareness Month	2
Opioid Epidemic.....	3
New Safety Inspection Sticker.....	3
Motorcycle and Bicycle Safety	3
New Toll Scam	4
Lock Sheds and Garages	4
Message from John W. Jones.....	4



**This Is What 911
Dispatchers Want
You to Know**



2024-2025

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**We Want to
Hear from You ...**

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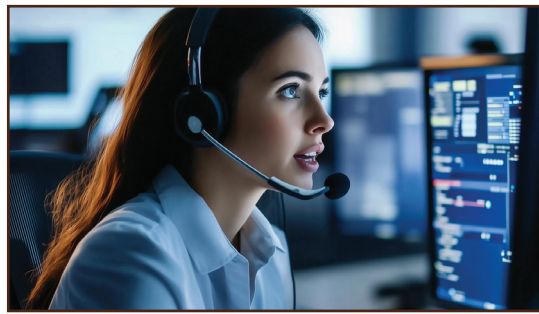
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DO THIS WHEN REPORTING AN EMERGENCY



Did you know there are things you can do to make an emergency call more efficient? When calling 911 to get help in an emergency, remember to stay calm, speak clearly, listen to all instructions, and answer all questions.

Emergency dispatchers may ask the caller the following questions:

- Where is the situation occurring?
- What is happening?
- When did the incident occur?
- Who is involved?
- Is a weapon involved?
- What injuries have been sustained?

Information is relayed to appropriate

personnel. Dispatchers can also provide instructions to perform CPR and other lifesaving techniques, as well as promote the personal safety of the caller.

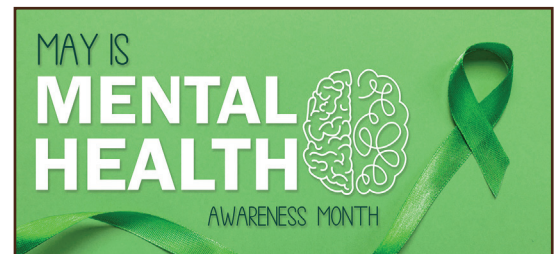
If you cannot call 911, in some VA localities you can send a text message to 911 for emergency services. However, 911 text is not available in all areas of Virginia or the U.S. That is why using a phone to dial 911 is still the most efficient way to reach emergency help, especially if it is a life-threatening emergency.

Retention, pay, stressful work, and long hours are all issues impacting dispatchers. That is why it was one of the Virginia Sheriffs' Association's (VSA) top priorities in the 2025 session of the General Assembly to address the issue of dispatcher pay, as well as the ongoing law enforcement recruitment and retention crisis. We are pleased to report that the GA approved an increase in starting salaries and funding for all communication operator positions allocated by the Compensation Board at appropriate levels.

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLNESS

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. During this important month, we want to take a moment to address the urgent mental health needs of first responders who experience repeated exposure to trauma. In response to this crisis, Governor Youngkin issued an executive order to establish an Office of First Responder Wellness. Specifically, the office will give \$3 million in grants to nonprofits and wellness agencies supporting first responders.

As a reminder, Virginia now has a mental health crisis hotline. By dialing 988, callers



will be connected to mental health counselors and mental health services. The hotline will help limit the amount of mental health emergency calls that 911 receives while ensuring callers can access rapid mental health assistance.

NATIONAL PEACE OFFICERS MEMORIAL DAY

In 1962, President Kennedy proclaimed May 15 as National Peace Officers Memorial Day and the calendar week in which May 15 falls, as National Police Week. Established by a joint resolution of Congress in 1962, National Police Week pays special recognition to those law enforcement officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty for the

OPIOID RELATED DEATHS DECLINE

According to the most recent data from the Virginia Department of Health, synthetic opioid-related deaths, which include deaths caused by fentanyl, decreased from over 2,000 in 2021 to under 1,800 in 2023.



The decrease is due in part to increased awareness about the dangers of fentanyl and greater availability and access to naloxone, a medicine that can reverse an opioid overdose. More drug users are carrying this medicine with them for safety.

In addition, many of the factors that were driving a spike in opioid overdose deaths during the pandemic, including social isolation, increased stress, and using drugs alone, are less of a factor today. Yet, even with this reduction, opioid abuse continues to devastate the lives of far too many Virginians. Each day, nearly five Virginians will die from an opioid overdose on average.

As Chesterfield County Sheriff Karl Leonard writes in an op-ed for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*: “The soft data from ‘reported’ overdoses or emergency visits is unreliable. ... The number of individuals still struggling from addiction remains alarmingly high, and our work is far from over.”

Sheriff Leonard stresses the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of the roots of substance use disorder (SUD), which is often “unresolved trauma.” According to Sheriff Leonard: “Rather than further criminalizing substance use disorder, we must legitimize trauma-informed care as a key pathway to ending addiction. By addressing the underlying trauma, we can help those suffering from addiction achieve long-term, even lifelong, recovery.”

As we work toward reducing opioid-related overdoses, it will be important to implement a comprehensive approach to opioid addiction and that includes treating post trauma of substance users. Investments in education, prevention, and treatment efforts, along with greater access to naloxone, will be critical to further reining in opioid overdoses in the future.

safety and protection of others. During this week, VSI continues to honor and reflect on those that paid the ultimate sacrifice. Join us in saying THANK YOU for law enforcement officers’ service and dedication.

NEW SAFETY INSPECTION STICKER

Look out for a change in the look of the Virginia safety inspection sticker for vehicles. In an effort to make it more difficult to counterfeit these stickers, the Virginia State Police approved a new design that includes a holographic state seal and a dogwood tree flower image—and it includes the color green for the first time.

Overall, the goal is to ensure vehicles on Virginia roadways are truly inspected by a qualified professional and are safe to be on our roadways. Inspection stickers being placed on cars this year and expiring in 2026 will be green. Stickers expiring in 2027 will be blue, stickers expiring in 2028 will be red, and stickers expiring in 2029 will be yellow.

MOTORCYCLE AND BIKE SAFETY AWARENESS MONTH

During the month of May, we are reminded of the importance of sharing the road with bicyclists and motorcyclists. Recent data from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles shows an increase in motorcycle and bicycle deaths. In 2023, 125 motorcyclists died in crashes on Virginia roads. That is nearly a 13 percent increase from 2022. Bicyclists were involved in 15 deadly crashes statewide, which was an increase of 36 percent from 2022.

As drivers, here are a few things you can do to keep everyone safe on our roadways:

- Slow down when passing a bicyclist;
- Keep the right side of your vehicle at least three feet away from the bicyclist;
- Change lanes if there is enough space to pass a bicyclist;
- Stay behind the bicyclist until you are sure it is safe to pass;
- Be aware of a motorcycle’s flashing signal, which may not self-cancel;
- Make sure the motorcycle is actually turning before proceeding.

With summer just a few months away, when we see a lot more bikers on Virginia roads, we hope you will remember these tips which will help you avoid crashes.

A Message From VSI Executive Director John W. Jones



On behalf of all of us at the Virginia Sheriffs' Institute (VSI), I hope you are excited to welcome the return of spring to the Commonwealth of Virginia!

Of course, with the return of warmer temperatures, many Virginians will be taking to the roadways, enjoying the change of the season and exploring all of the wonderful family-oriented events, parks, and scenery Virginia has to offer. I encourage drivers to be extra vigilant, especially as this time of year sees more

bicyclists and motorcyclists taking to the roadways.

Warmer weather also means more opportunities for criminals to steal your personal belongings. Please remember that unlocked doors of any kind, even if you are just in your backyard doing yardwork, could give a would-be thief just enough time to steal something that is valuable. Be extra vigilant if you are doing any outdoor activity or lawn work. Simply locking the doors of your home, garage and shed could be enough to deter most would-be thieves.

Of course, the goal of VSI is to support law enforcement and their tireless work fighting crime and promoting public safety. And as a strong partner in these efforts, I urge you to report crimes and suspicious activity when you see them so that we can do our very best to keep your community a safe place to work, play, live, and raise our families.

I want you to know it is my privilege to serve as Executive Director of VSI, and I urge you to contact your sheriff's office if you have any concerns about crime prevention or public safety efforts in your community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John W. Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being more prominent.

John W. Jones, Executive Director
Virginia Sheriffs' Institute
901 East Byrd Street, Suite 1301
Richmond, Virginia 23219

NEWEST SCAM TARGETS TOLL USERS

Have you received a text out of the blue claiming you have unpaid tolls and need to pay immediately? If so, you are not alone. A growing number of Virginians are receiving text messages saying their car had an unpaid toll and urging them to pay the specified dollar amount by clicking on a link included in the message.

The linked website looks legitimate, so unless someone is being extra cautious, they could be duped into entering their bank or credit card information. If you fall for the scam, you might not only be giving away your money, but they could also receive personal information, like your driver's license number.

Bottom line, if you receive an unsolicited text that claims it is from E-ZPass Virginia or a specific toll facility, do not click on the link. First check to see if the link is legitimate by reaching out directly to the Virginia Department of Transportation, which manages tolling operations, through the phone number listed on their official website. If it is determined the message is not legitimate, use your cell phone's "report junk" option to report unwanted texts and then delete the text.

It is important to note that E-ZPass may send you text messages if you have opted to have text alerts about balances and insufficient funds, but it will not prompt you to click on any link.

LOCK YOUR SHEDS AND GARAGES

Theft is often a crime of opportunity. That is why, as temperatures begin to rise and our lawns need weekly care, it is important to protect expensive lawn and garden tools. Sheds and garages are often left open and unattended when we do yard work or other outdoor activities.

Criminals are counting on us to let our guard down. The simplest thing to do is close and lock home, garage, and shed doors. You can also take the preemptive step of photographing and recording the serial numbers on your expensive equipment so in the event of a theft, they can be more easily recovered.