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the effects of a warm summer evening and the invincibility of youth, decided to have a swim. For some reason, known only to them, they thought it might be a good idea to swim across the river to Kentucky. So they jumped in. As they neared the halfway point—the well-known “point of no return”—they began to tire and realized they were not going to make it all the way across. Luckily, they finally made one good decision that night and swam towards a channel marker, a lighted buoy in the middle of the river.

Unfortunately, the first 9-1-1 call they placed did not route directly to the Saline County PSAP but to Union County, Kentucky. The call was lost and the victim called 9-1-1 again and that call was routed to Posey County, Indiana. Again, the call was dropped and the next call was routed to Gallatin County 9-1-1. Those calls are answered by the Saline County E-911 PSAP. Up to three

agencies began to respond to help these stranded youngsters from multiple access points along the Indiana and Kentucky shores, at great expense and risk to the first responders. Eventually, the correct agency was identified and the victims were located and brought home to safety.

Both the railroad and the maritime industries use mile markers as frames of location reference that are not familiar to the average 9-1-1 caller, so Saline County has added river mile markers as well as railroad mile markers to their GIS mapping.

“They converted an old railway to a bike trail, but left up the railroad mile markers, which we have incorporated GIS mapping. When a 9-1-1 caller gives us the mile marker on the bike trail, then we are able to identify a location even better in the same way we have been using the river mile markers when we receive a call for a person on a tow-barge

or steam boat who has a medical issue,” said Lt. Felty.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

PSAPs can take away important lessons from the Saline County 9-1-1 experience to help telecommunicators stay on top of situations in which location becomes tricky to manage.

- Make sure telecommunicators know the details of the local geography. Focus in those areas where cellular technology may break down, such as wilderness areas in rural regions, or “urban canyons” and underground structures, like subways, in large cities. Field trips to actually see the landmarks and topography help telecommunicators visualize where the caller is calling from and can help pin point their location for first responders. Train telecommunicators how to provide the caller with information needed to get to safety.
- Train telecommunicators on how location technology works. Help them understand how GPS devices and cellular technology receive location data from satellites or the cellular network to help them understand what the caller may be experiencing.
- Work with local or regional GIS departments to make sure CAD and telephony maps are current and contain layers that display accurate landmarks and topography.
- Warn citizens as much as possible about areas where location may not be easily determined if they phone 9-1-1.

It is the men and women who wear the headsets and answer the emergency calls that are the *first first responders*, who can often make a real difference in the call having a successful outcome. Location is one of the most important pieces of information required to get a clear picture of what is happening for every call for service. Sometimes, it requires effort and creative use of location technology by well-trained telecommunicators to successfully resolve the incident! ●

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