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# Bungled 911 call delayed aid to cyclist

## Inquiry begun on Boston mishap

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT    SEPTEMBER 27, 2011

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A State Police emergency dispatcher mishandled a recent 911 call, and a Boston ambulance subsequently took more than twice the average time to reach an injured bicyclist, who waited on a Brighton sidewalk for nearly half an hour before he was taken to a hospital.

State Police say they are investigating why the distress call was not properly relayed and plan to take corrective action internally. Meanwhile, Boston Emergency Medical Services says it is using the case to review procedures to determine what can be done to improve future response times.

On Sept. 10 at 9:11 p.m., State Police said, they received a 911 call from a witness's cellphone saying that a bicyclist in his 20s had been injured in a fall near the intersection of Washington and Fairbanks streets,

near Oak Square.

In Massachusetts, 911 calls made from a mobile phone are routed first to State Police, who ask for the caller's emergency and location and then transfer the call to the emergency agency closest to the scene, officials said.

But in the case of the injured cyclist, the initial call was lost during the transfer to Boston EMS, and the State Police dispatcher then failed to follow protocol and remain on the line with the caller until a local dispatcher answered.

"We did mishandle a call," said State Police spokesman David Procopio.

He said the internal investigation could lead to "a range of corrective action, from retraining to reprimand to something more serious."

Although the initial emergency call was dropped before Boston EMS answered, the department said dispatchers there still received notification of the call, along with the caller's phone number. At 9:14 p.m. Boston EMS said, they reached the caller by phone, gathered the details of the situation within two minutes, and dispatched an ambulance at 9:20 p.m.

In the meantime, witnesses said they drove to the Oak Square firehouse to report the accident. Firefighters responded and began treating the cyclist at around 9:18 p.m., authorities said.

An ambulance reached the scene at 9:36 p.m., 25 minutes after the initial 911 call was placed.

"We trust it's a very isolated incident," said Jennifer Mehigan, a Boston EMS spokeswoman. "It's a very long time for us."

She added: "There were several incidents in Brighton occurring at the same time, and the ambulance that responded to this incident was coming from another neighborhood, resulting in a response time that was unusually long in this case."

The ambulance journeyed across the city on a Saturday night, typically “a very busy time,” for emergency responders, Mehigan said. To reach the Brighton victim, the ambulance traveled from the scene of another incident about 6.5 miles away on Columbia Road in Dorchester, she said.

Because Boston EMS was handling several higher-priority calls, it took six minutes from when the call was answered until the ambulance was dispatched, she said. The wait time to dispatch is generally no longer than one minute.

According to several witnesses, the cyclist was riding on Washington Street toward Oak Square, then swerved to avoid colliding with a minivan that had stopped. The cyclist struck the sidewalk curb, flew over the handlebars, and landed on the sidewalk.

The cyclist was taken to St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center in Brighton and later Brigham and Women’s Hospital. A friend of the victim said that the cyclist had surgery to fuse his vertebrae and that he had lost most of the mobility in his neck.

At the cyclist’s request, the friend asked that neither his name nor his friend’s be published. He described the victim as a 25-year-old Somerville resident and Connecticut native who has lived in the Boston area since attending Emerson College.

The victim, described by the friend as an avid cyclist, is in Connecticut, recuperating at his family’s home.

No official determination of fault has been made in the accident. Boston police said they had received no notification of it, nor had a police report been filed.

*Matt Rocheleau can be reached at [mjrochele@gmail.com](mailto:mjrochele@gmail.com). For more coverage of Boston neighborhoods and nearby towns, go to [boston.com/yourtown](http://boston.com/yourtown).*

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