

Sex Crime Calls Given Low Status

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The Detroit Police Department has issued a new set of 911 emergency response priority codes, but critics of the old list say they fear the police will still be putting too much emphasis on protecting property. They say police may be quick to respond to relatively harmless crimes "in progress" but not fast enough on more serious crimes that "just happened."

The City Council has scheduled its fourth hearing on the subject next Tuesday, and this week Council President Carl Levin fired off a strongly worded letter to Police Chief Philip G. Tannian in which Levin said, "I seriously question a number of the codes left unchanged on the revised list, particularly under the category of sex crimes."

According to the priorities list, a woman who has just been raped would get quicker help if she lied and told the 911 operator her car was being stolen or her purse was being snatched.

The list, known as the "incident codes," was revised this spring to eliminate what Levin called such "backward priorities."

Just how closely the police dispatchers are following the new list in assigning squad cars appears to be a matter of debate. One communications lieutenant said it is used "only as a guideline."

FOR EXAMPLE, a woman who has escaped a would-be rapist is given a lower priority on the list than a report of:

- Non-payment of a taxicab fare.
- A ringing burglar alarm.
- An open door.
- Any assault, burglary or auto theft that has just happened.

● An exhibitionist exposing himself.

The incident codes categorize the 192 most frequent calls for police assistance into five groups that guide dispatchers in assigning police cars when they cannot answer all calls for help.

Last October the City Council began complaining that the priorities were slanted in favor of property over the safety and well-being of people.

A few months after the council began looking into the priorities list, Chief Tannian announced that while he found the list satisfactory, a continuing review would be made.

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CARL LEVIN: "I'd rather have the police catch one rapist than three car thieves."

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