

TRANSCRIPT

Effective Communications with Law Enforcement Officers (Police)

Question 10: Exigent Circumstances -Entry of a Property

Michael Baer, Emergency and Public Communication Access Program Coordinator

Now, let's consider the same topic-exigent circumstances- but a different situation. Suppose an officer is called to a person's house due to a 911 call because something has happened there. When the officer arrives, he/she knocks on the door and a woman answers. Of course, the officer asks, "Is everything okay? I'm responding to a 911 call." The woman replies by saying that, "Everything is fine." But the officer acts on a hunch and decides to enter the house anyway. Can an officer do that or not? Does an officer have the right to do that? Like you said, the officer makes a decision in that moment and enters the woman's house suspecting that the woman is not okay even though she has said that "Everything is fine." Can you explain what happens in that kind of situation?

Chief Ted Baran, Director of Campus Security at Gallaudet University

Sure, in that situation, exigent circumstances is a little different. Now, we have a duty to investigate 911 calls and many of those 911 calls are mistakes. Yes, I admit it. We have a responsibility to investigate. So, in that situation, where it is a woman or a man, if an officer knocks on the door and says, "Is everything okay? We got a 911 call from this house, is everything okay?" And they say, "Everything's fine" we still have a duty to investigate more. If we immediately leave, we don't know what may be happening inside the house. There could be a dead body or someone severely injured. We, as police, do have a right to enter, but tend to try not to force ourselves into someone's home. We ask, "Would you mind if I take a look around the house? Is there another person here that I can talk to?" But we have to investigate. Maybe there is a person injured inside or we notice that everything is broken or destroyed in the house. If so, we know there's more to the story. But that's one case of exigent circumstances where we have a duty, responsibility, and right to enter a person's house to investigate. If there are two people involved in a domestic incident, officers prefer to separate both parties and see if their stories match up. That allows an opportunity for the female to tell the police officer that she's scared or hurt. So we try to separately investigate and if it turns out that everything is fine, great. But, if there's more to it, then we investigate further.

