

# The New York Times

## **New Jersey Acts to Shift Callers In Some Emergencies to 211**

The New York Times, October 1, 2006

New Jersey has its 2-1-1 phone line, started last year to connect callers with information on human services, to handle calls from people wondering what to do in an emergency -- like a hurricane or a terrorist attack -- yet not requiring immediate help.

The next time a natural disaster or another crisis occurs, New Jersey residents can get nonemergency help by dialing 211.

"We are taking an important step toward improving the flow of information during times of emergency or heightened alert," Gov. Jon S. Corzine said last week. "By expanding the state's existing 211 telephone system New Jersey's residents will have an easy-to-remember number to call for information on how to proceed in the face of everything from terrorism threats to natural disasters."

The plan was designed to ease the burden on operators for 911 and on local police dispatchers, who would already be swamped with calls directly related to the emergency.

The 211 line is being geared toward getting out information like storm evacuation routes or advice on where to find food and shelter if the emergency causes damage.

The system still has some bugs to be worked out, however.

During a chemical emergency in Elizabeth on Tuesday afternoon, in which more than 50 people were sickened by a noxious cloud and a wide area was cordoned off, a 211 operator had no information available.

Later, the state's Homeland Security Department gave operators information on the situation in Elizabeth, a spokesman said.

"That is exactly the type of situation we had in mind for 211," said Richard Canas, New Jersey's homeland security director. "Traffic was tied up in knots, and if people called 211, they could have found out what was going on and what they should do."