

Celeste signs 911 emergency phone bill

By Peter Jensen

Post staff reporter

The phone caller dials three numbers to reach the emergency switchboard. Three seconds later the nearest emergency crew is dispatched. Instantly the switchboard operator knows precisely the location of the caller.

That's how the new 911 emergency phone system will work once it's operating throughout Ohio.

Today Gov. Richard Celeste signed a bill that paves the way for the enhanced 911 emergency phone system

statewide.

"The speed and efficiency of this system reduces critical response time, which means ambulances get to heart attack victims quicker, fire departments get to fires faster and police get to the scenes of crimes more rapidly," Celeste said.

"In short, the 911 system can mean the difference between life and death."

Cincinnati and Hamilton County emergency service officials have long advocated an enhanced 911 system as a potentially life-saving improvement.

More than 40 major U.S. cities already have the service.

"We've worked on this a long time and all the local fire and police departments and most elected officials have voiced support for it," said Dr. William Gates, a physician and leading 911 supporter.

"Now, we must make the public understand and once they do, they will support it the same way."

Cincinnati Bell has estimated that 911 installation could take 18 to 24 months in the six-county Greater Cin-

cincinnati area.

Under the legislation, most of the installation costs would be financed by a state telephone utilities tax credit that totals \$15 million spread out over as many as 10 years.

It would cost about \$2.4 million to install the 911 equipment in Hamilton County with an additional cost for installing and maintaining each public safety answering point.

Operating costs would be paid for by a 15-cent per month charge to telephone customers. It is estimated that

the tax would raise \$59,202 monthly.

But before that can happen, a five-member planning committee representing the city, county and other county municipalities must agree to a countywide 911 plan. The proposal must then get the approval of municipalities representing 60 percent of the county's population.

"It's going to take a while to plan the system and we're anxious to get started," said Hamilton County Commissioner Robert A. Taft II. "We've already scheduled a staff meeting for next week to get the ball rolling."