

FLINT

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Genesee County officials talked about life-and-death scenarios last spring when they launched an enhanced 911 system that allows dispatchers to pinpoint cellphone callers on a map screen.

Last month, the technology paid off for a Flint Township woman whose car slid into a slush-filled ravine along I-75 in Grand Blanc Township.

Deborah Plourde was driving south on I-75 in heavy snow and near white-out conditions when a pickup truck cut her off, causing her PT Cruiser to spin out of control and into a ravine filled with snow, slush and water.

Unhurt but disoriented, she dialed 911 on her cellphone.

"I had no idea where I was," said Plourde. "I thought I was down in Holly, just past Grange Hall Road. The officers said they would send someone out."

Plourde said she might have remained in the ditch "until the snow thawed" had it not been for caller location system.

Police were unable to find her car until a frantic Plourde called back on her cellphone about 30 minutes later. Dispatchers used the enhanced 911 system to mark her location near the I-75/I-475 interchange in Grand Blanc Township.

Officers couldn't see her car through the blowing snow, but she was able to watch for the strobe lights and alert dispatchers when police were at her location.

The incident was the type of emergency that county officials talked about when they launched the technology in April. The county was the first in the state to deploy the network.

Dave Ackley, the county's assistant 911 director, said the system has helped find other callers, but none as potentially serious as Plourde's ordeal.

"It was one of those things where you have to trust your technology," he said.

Plourde, 50, was not physically injured and was able to continue on to work after township police found her and summoned a tow truck.

The trip to Royal Oak had one more glitch, though.

About four or five miles down the road, her right front passenger tire went flat, forcing her to install a spare on the shoulder of the freeway. Gravel had broken the seal around the rim, she said.

"I was about 2 1/2 hours late to work," she said. "I was wringing wet."

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