

Questions and Answers About Text-to-9-1-1

What is text-to-9-1-1?

Text-to-9-1-1 refers to the ability to send text messages to local 9-1-1 call centers during an emergency. Despite growing reliance on text messaging by millions of consumers, almost all 9-1-1 call centers today cannot receive text messages; they can only receive *voice* calls, about two-thirds of which are from wireless phones. A limited amount of caller data is automatically provided to the call centers, such as the caller's location, which may be only approximate if the call is placed from a wireless phone or a large, multi-unit building.

In a Next Generation 9-1-1 environment, consumers will be able to make voice, text, or video "calls" from any communications device via Internet Protocol-based networks. Such calls may provide additional useful information to the 9-1-1 center, such as the caller's medical history (if pre-approved by the caller), the schematics of a building, or images of an accident scene.

What are the benefits of text-to-9-1-1?

There will be many significant benefits to consumers, especially in cases when the caller cannot communicate verbally. For example, text-to-9-1-1 will be very useful to the approximately 34 million Americans who are hard of hearing, deaf, or speech-impaired. Text-to-9-1-1 could also help in situations when a crime is in process; the caller is facing domestic abuse; the caller is injured and cannot speak; or other scenarios.

When will text-to-9-1-1 be broadly available?

Under a historic agreement reached in December 2012 between NENA, the "Big 4" wireless carriers (Verizon, AT&T, Sprint, and T-Mobile), and the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International (APCO), text-to-9-1-1 capabilities will be in place on those four carriers' networks by May 2014. However, this does *not* mean that text-to-9-1-1 service will be available to *all* consumers by 2014; the *actual* availability will also hinge on the deployment of new systems and training at more than 6,000 9-1-1 centers across America.

That said, the "Big 4" agreement – and subsequent action by the FCC to begin codifying that agreement -- is expected to hasten the day when all Americans can call for emergency aid via text messages.

NOTE: Until text-to-9-1-1 service is implemented in a given area, texters in those areas will receive an automatic "bounce-back" message indicating that text-to-9-1-1 is not yet available, and advising to use another method to contact emergency authorities.

Even when text-to-9-1-1 becomes widely available, the best way to contact 9-1-1 will continue to be via voice communications whenever possible.



How does it work?

Wireless carriers will provide text-to-9-1-1 services in the format requested by local 9-1-1 call centers, e.g., through TTY, through Internet Protocol (IP), or other technologies. The carriers will provision the service based on the call centers' requests.

What does this mean in terms of funding for 9-1-1?

There is growing concern that existing funding models for 9-1-1 cannot be sustained because of the growing number of devices and services not covered by traditional 9-1-1 fees, as well as the diversion of 9-1-1 funds to other uses in some states. NENA and its partners are exploring and advocating for new funding models to maintain high-quality 9-1-1 services and accelerate the momentum toward NG9-1-1.

Are there current pilots in progress?

The state of Vermont and several local governments across the United States are currently piloting text-to-9-1-1 programs. NENA will help share these successes and lessons learned with emergency call centers across the nation.

What are the major challenges to making text-to-9-1-1 work?

As noted above, the widespread availability of text-to-9-1-1 will depend not only on telecommunications carriers but also on the ability of more than 6,000 9-1-1 centers to implement new systems and training. A key challenge facing 9-1-1 call centers is selecting the text-to-9-1-1 platform that works best in their individual centers, out of more than a dozen solutions available today. Emergency call centers and authorities need to conduct extensive research and testing – including input from front-line call takers -- to select the option that best fits their needs.

Why is text-to-9-1-1 needed now?

Simply put, text messaging is one of the primary ways people communicate today, especially younger people and members of the hearing and speech disabilities community. According to Forrester Research, an estimated 6 billion SMS messages are sent every day in the United States, or more than 2.2 trillion per year. The 9-1-1 community is constantly striving to meet the evolving needs of the public, and right now that means implementing text-to-9-1-1 solutions.

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