

GM911 Text-to-911 Frequently Asked Questions

What is text-to-911?

Text-to-911 refers to the ability to send a short message service (SMS) text to local 911 call centers during an emergency. Despite growing reliance on text messaging by millions of consumers, almost all 911 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.

Why is text-to-911 needed now?

Simply put, text messaging is one of the primary ways people communicate today, especially younger generations and members of the hearing and speech disabilities community. According to Forrester Research, an estimated 6 billion messages are sent every day in the United States. The 911 community is constantly striving to meet the evolving needs of the public.

What are the benefits of text-to-911?

There are many significant benefits to consumers, especially in cases when the caller cannot communicate verbally. For example, text-to-911 will be very useful to the approximately 34 million Americans who are hard of hearing, deaf, or speech-impaired. Text-to-911 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-911 be broadly available?

Under a historic agreement reached in December 2012 between National Emergency Number Association (NENA), the "Big 4" wireless carriers (AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon), and the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International (APCO), text-to-911 capabilities will be in place on those four carriers' networks by May 15, 2014. However, this does not mean that text-to-911 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 6,000 911 centers across America.

NOTE: Until text-to-911 service is implemented in a given area, texters in those areas will receive an automatic "bounce back" message indicating that text-to-911 is not yet available, and advising to use another method to contact emergency authorities.

Even when text-to-911 becomes widely available, the best way to contact 911 will continue to be via voice communications whenever possible.

The FCC has mandated that all cellular providers must be able to accept texting-to-911 by December 31, 2014. Cellular providers have until June 30, 2015 to deliver this to emergency communication centers upon written request for this service.

How does it work?

Wireless carriers will provide text-to-911 services in the format requested by local 911 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 are the major challenges to making text-to-911 work?

As noted above, the widespread availability of text-to-911 will depend not only on telecommunications carriers but also on the ability of more than 6,000 911 centers to implement new systems and training. A key challenge facing 911 call centers is selecting the text-to-911 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.

Can I send a text to 9-1-1?

Texting to 911 is not available in most areas. The 911 industry is committed to working with wireless carriers and the FCC to implement text-to-911 throughout the country in the next few years. You may check with your local 911 center or the FCC website to see if it is available in your area.

http://transition.fcc.gov/pshs/911/Text_911_Deployments.pdf

When text-to-911 is available in your area please remember: **texting should only be used when you are unable to make a voice call to 911.**

How to text 9-1-1 in an emergency:

- Enter the numbers "911" in the "To" field;
- The first text message to 911 should be brief and contain the location of the emergency and type of help needed;
- Push the "Send" button.
- Be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 911 call taker.
- Text in simple words – **do not use abbreviations.**
- Keep text messages brief and concise.

Below are a few things to know and be aware of if you need to text 9-1-1:

- *Always call 911 if you can.*
- Text location information is not equal to current location technology.
- As with all text messages, 911 messages can take longer to receive, can get out of order, or may not be received.
- Text-to-911 is not available if you are roaming.
- A text or data plan is required to place a text-to-911.
- If texting to 911 is not available in your area, or is temporarily unavailable, you will receive a message indicating that texting 911 is not available and to contact 911 by other means.
- Texts sent to 911 have the same 160 character limit as other text messages
- Photos and videos cannot be sent to 911 at this time.
- Text-to-911 cannot include more than one person. Do not send your emergency text to anyone other than 911.
- **Do not text and drive!**

Should I Call or Text 911?

"Call if you can, text if you can't", Citizens should be encouraged to text **only** when calling 911 is not an option. Some agencies may not be able to receive text messages.

I am part of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Do we need to do anything different to now text 911?

No, all you need is a text capable phone with a data plan.

I use a Pre-paid wireless service; will I be able to text 911?

Some Pre-paid services may work via the "Big 4" providers. Others are required to provide this capability by December 31, 2014. Pre-paid consumers will have to consult with Pre-Paid phone vendors to determine if they are able to text-to-911. This may depend on the package that is purchased by the consumer.

Do emergency texts receive priority?

Cell providers treat messages to 911 like any other text message, so your texts will be subject to the same service speeds and or delays, depending on network strength in your area.

Will GM911 know the location of the individual texting 911?

We will receive the cell tower location, provider, and phone number in this process. Providers will only be providing limited information; as they expand these capabilities, we anticipate this to become more accurate. With all emergency interactions GM911 will verify the location within the first few seconds of contact.

Will the text conversation drop as a person moves between cell tower locations?

No, the “caller/texter” is connected to the 911 center until we release the conversation. Depending on the cellular provider delays with text messages could be experienced.

Can my text be transferred to another agency just like my phone call can?

No, GM911 will take these text messages and call the appropriate agency. This will help to reduce missed text and to avoid confusion.

Will I be able to send pictures to 911 of an accident or suspicious activity during an emergency text? If not when will I be able to?

No the “Big 4” providers only support standard alphanumeric text messages with no multimedia attachments like audio, pictures or video. At some point in the next few years providers will allow for multimedia. Initially they are only providing the basic messaging. Once this is developed and the infrastructure is in place we will move to this technology.

Will you be able to translate text in Spanish or another foreign language?

No, these individuals will be directed to call 911. If in the event they can't GM911 will contact our translation provider to assist.