Text-to-911: What You Need to Know

Text-to-911 is the ability to send a text message to reach 911 emergency call takers from your mobile phone or device.

In the future, text-to-911 will be widely available in the United States. However, text-to-911 is currently only available in certain markets where 911 call centers, also known as Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), have elected to accept emergency text messages from the public. For this reason, unless you have confirmed that the PSAP in your area supports text-to-911, you should not rely on text to reach 911. A list of areas supporting the service is available at http://transition.fcc.gov/pshs/911/Text911PSAP/Text_911_Master_PSAP_Registry.xlsx.

The Commission has recently taken steps to make text-to-911 more widely available in the future. On August 8, 2014, the Commission adopted an order (www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-adopts-text-911-rules) that will require all wireless carriers and other text messaging providers that enable consumers to send text messages to and from U.S. phone numbers to deliver emergency texts to PSAPs that request them. Wireless carriers and other text messaging providers that were not already supporting text-to-911 were directed to be capable of doing so by the end of 2014, and must respond to PSAP requests to deliver text-to-911 by June 30, 2015, or six months from the date of the PSAP’s request, whichever is later.

Additional information regarding the availability of text-to-911 is provided below, and will be updated periodically.

We advise consumers that even in areas where PSAPs accept text-to-911, it is a complement to, not a substitute for, existing voice-based 911 service. Consumers should make a voice call to contact 911 during an emergency when possible.

How to contact 911

If you use a wireless phone or other type of mobile device, make sure to do the following in an emergency:

- Always contact 911 by making a voice call, if you can.
- If you are deaf, hard of hearing or speech disabled, and text-to-911 is not available, use a TTY or a telecommunications relay service, if possible.
- Remember - in most cases now, you cannot reach 911 by sending a text message.

Bounce-back messages

If you attempt to send a text to 911 where the service is not yet available, FCC rules require all wireless carriers and other text messaging providers to send an automatic “bounce-back” message.

- Consumers who receive this “bounce-back” message will be advised to contact emergency services by another means, such as by making a voice call or using a telecommunications relay service (the latter for consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech disability).
- The bounce-back requirement is intended to inform consumers and minimize the risk of a consumer mistakenly believing that a text to 911 has been transmitted to the PSAP where the service is not available.

When will text-to-911 become widely available?

- All U.S. wireless carriers and other text messaging providers that are not already supporting text-to-911 must be capable of doing so, and must respond to PSAP requests to deliver text-to-911 by June 30, 2015, or six months from the date a PSAP request, whichever is later.
The Commission has encouraged PSAPs to begin accepting texts as text providers develop text-to-911 capability. It is up to each PSAP to decide whether and when to begin accepting texts. PSAPs currently accepting text messages are listed here http://transition.fcc.gov/pshs/911/Text911PSAP/Text_911_Master_PSAP_Registry.xlsx

We expect that others will do so and that text-to-911 will become available in more areas over time. Information on best practices from public safety organizations and from PSAPs that have implemented text-to-911 is available here http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/best-practices-implementing-text-911.

Which service providers must support text-to-911?

- The four major wireless carriers (AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon) are already voluntarily providing text-to-911 service in areas served by their networks where PSAPs are prepared to receive texts.
- The Commission's text-to-911 rules apply to all wireless carriers and other text messaging providers that enable consumers to send text messages to and from U.S. phone numbers. Therefore, all such providers will be required to begin delivering emergency texts to requesting PSAPs by June 30, 2015.
- The Commission's text-to-911 rules do not apply to text messaging applications that do not support texting to and from U.S. phone numbers. Text messaging apps that only support texting with other app users or texting via social media are not required to support text-to-911.
- The FCC adopted a Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) that explores additional issues about text-to-911, including the delivery of location information, support for text-to-911 when roaming and future texting services, such as real-time text communications.

Status of text-to-911 deployments

- Areas Where Text-to-911 Is Available (Excel, updated monthly) http://transition.fcc.gov/pshs/911/Text911PSAP/Text_911_Master_PSAP_Registry.xlsx

For more information

To learn more about FCC programs to promote access to telecommunications services for people with disabilities, visit the FCC's Disability Rights Office website at www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/disability-rights-office. You have multiple options for contacting the FCC:

- Via the Consumer Help Center: https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); Videophone for ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail:
  
  Federal Communications Commission
  Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
  Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
  445 12th Street, S.W.
  Washington, DC 20554

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Last Reviewed 11/6/15