

VoIP and 911 Service

Portable interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services can be used from virtually any Internet connection anywhere, which raises challenges for the emergency services community in determining the location from which a 911 call has originated.

You should be aware that:

- VoIP 911 calls may not connect to the PSAP, or may improperly ring to the administrative line of the PSAP, which may not be staffed after hours, or by trained 911 operators.
- VoIP 911 calls may correctly connect to the PSAP, but not automatically transmit the user's phone number and/or location information.
- VoIP customers may need to provide location or other information to their VoIP providers, and update this information if they change locations, for their VoIP 911 service to function properly.
- VoIP service may not work during a power outage, or when the Internet connection fails or becomes overloaded.

Tips for subscribers to fully interconnected VoIP service

If you have or are thinking of subscribing to an interconnected VoIP service, you should:

- Provide your accurate physical address to your interconnected VoIP service provider to ensure that emergency services can quickly be dispatched to your location.
- Be familiar with your VoIP service provider's procedures for updating your address, and promptly update address information in the event of a change.
- Have a clear understanding of any limitations of your 911 service.
- Inform children, babysitters and visitors about your VoIP service and its 911 limitations, if any.
- If your power is out or your Internet connection is down, be aware that your VoIP service may not work. Consider installing a backup power supply, maintaining a traditional phone line or having a wireless phone as a backup.
- If you have questions about whether the phone service you are receiving is an interconnected VoIP service, contact your service provider for further information.
- PSAPs currently lack the technical capability to receive texts, photos and video.

FCC E911 rules

The FCC requires that providers of interconnected VoIP telephone services using the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) meet Enhanced 911 (E911) obligations. E911 systems automatically provide to emergency service personnel a 911 caller's call back number and, in most cases, location information.

To reduce possible risks to public safety, the FCC requires interconnected VoIP providers to:

- Automatically provide 911 service to all customers as a standard, mandatory feature. VoIP providers may not allow customers to "opt-out" of 911 service.
- Obtain a customer's physical location prior to service activation, and provide one or more easy ways for customers to update the location they have registered with the provider if it changes.

- Transmit all 911 calls, as well as a callback number and the caller's registered physical location, to the appropriate emergency services call center or local emergency authority.
- Take appropriate action to ensure customers have a clear understanding of the limitations, if any, of their 911 service. They must distribute labels warning customers if 911 service may be limited or not available and instruct them to place the labels on or near equipment used with VoIP service.
- Obtain affirmative acknowledgement from all customers that they are aware of and understand the limitations of their 911 service.
- Ensure that a 911 call is routed to the appropriate PSAP in areas where emergency service providers are not capable of receiving or processing the location information or call back numbers not automatically transmitted with 911 calls.

VoIP service providers that do not fully interconnect with the PSTN are not currently required to comply with the FCC's 911 and E911 rules.

Filing a complaint

If you have been unable to access emergency services while using VoIP service, you have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) ; ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
 Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
 Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
 445 12th Street, S.W.
 Washington, DC 20554

Accessible formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number above, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

###

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

Last Reviewed 11/2/15

