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FCC ACTS ON WIRELESS CARRIER AND PUBLIC SAFETY REQUESTS REGARDING ENHANCED WIRELESS 911 SERVICES

Washington, DC – The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has taken action in response to requests from several wireless carriers and one public safety agency regarding the timely deployment of wireless enhanced 911 (E911) services. It conditionally approved, with certain modifications, the compliance plans of five nationwide carriers –Nextel, Sprint, Verizon and the GSM portions of AT&T Wireless and Cingular’s networks. It also said that the FCC Enforcement Bureau would be charged with enforcing wireless phone company deployment schedules to phase in these E911 capabilities and taking enforcement action against non-compliant companies.

In response to a request by the City of Richardson, Texas, the FCC also amended its rules to clarify the actions that need to be taken by 911 call centers in order to make a valid request for Phase I and II E911 service.

The FCC’s rules, adopted in 1996, after successful negotiation of a Consensus Agreement among wireless carrier and public safety representatives, were divided into two phases - Phase I and Phase II. Phase I rules require carriers, subject to certain conditions, to provide Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) with the telephone number of the originator of a 911 call and the location of the cell site or base station receiving a 911 call. Phase II rules require wireless carriers to begin providing more precise Automatic Location Identification (ALI), subject to certain conditions and schedules and to complete the transition by December 31, 2005. Each carrier’s precise method of achieving E911 capability varies depending on whether they are employing a handset or network-based system for their ALI capability.

Specifically, the Commission has taken the following actions, approving plans to implement E911 Phase II for the six nationwide wireless carriers (VoiceStream’s implementation plan was approved in September 2000), which together serve more than 75 percent of the subscribers in the country.

* With respect to 3 companies (Nextel, Sprint, and Verizon) that had met FCC requirements to provide a clear, detailed and enforceable plan to phase-in its ALI capabilities, the Commission agreed to take into account the companies’ showings about equipment availability, and allow them to implement Phase II E911 according to a modified schedule for some of the initial 2001 and 2002 deployment milestones. It said it would strictly adhere to enforcement of these modified plans for meeting these alternative intermediate milestones and for completing E911 deployment by 2005.

* With respect to 2 companies, (AT&T and Cingular) that submitted E911 compliance plans for the GSM portion of their wireless networks, the Commission provided similar relief, also conditioned on strict FCC enforcement of their new schedules.

* The Commission noted that while AT&T and Cingular had submitted compliance plans for the TDMA portion of their networks, the timing of those submissions did not permit Commission consideration. Accordingly, discussions have been initiated between these carriers and FCC Enforcement Bureau staff concerning possible consent decrees with the Commission to resolve this compliance issue.

* To track carrier compliance with the revised schedules, the FCC imposed specific reporting requirements on the carriers regarding the implementation of both Phase I and Phase II of E911. Carrier Quarterly Progress Reports will be filed starting next year on February 1st, May 1st, August 1st, and November 1st.

* The FCC will conduct an ongoing inquiry on E911 technical issues, including evaluation of reports and submissions by technology vendors, network equipment and handset manufacturers and carriers concerning technology standards issues, development of hardware and software, and supply conditions.

In addition to acting on the major carriers' requests, the Commission took the following actions:

* In response to a request by the City of Richardson, Texas, the FCC amended its rules to clarify the actions that need to be taken by 911 call centers in order to make a valid request for Phase I and II E911 service. This decision should reduce current uncertainties regarding the validity of various service requests by those centers. It should also help direct resources to deploying Phase I and II capabilities in communities that in fact are or will soon be ready to use the information to save lives, without imposing overly burdensome requirements on the public safety community or the local governments that support them.

* The Commission also established an additional period for carriers other than the six nationwide carriers to submit requests for relief in recognition of the challenges faced by many smaller and rural carriers. Any of these carriers who cannot comply with the Commission's E911 deployment rules must file a petition seeking relief by November 30, 2001, if they do not already have such a request on file. Carriers are permitted to file jointly, and, to the extent they believe they are facing similar deployment issues, are encouraged to do so. The FCC will evaluate the filings, including those already on file, and decide how best to address E911 compliance by these carriers as soon as possible after this period. During this extended filing and evaluation period, the Commission will not initiate enforcement action under the E911 Phase II rules against such carriers.

The FCC noted that under the plans approved today, with certain limited exceptions, these major carriers will be required to be providing Phase II information to public safety answering points (PSAPS) ready to receive and utilize the information next year so that can honor all their valid PSAP requests by the end of the year. Also, these carriers will achieve complete deployment of Phase II, in full compliance with the Commission's accuracy standards, in all areas across the nation where 911 call centers are ready and able to use this information by the end dates in the existing Commission rules – i.e., no later than December 31, 2005.

The Commission also noted that despite the substantial progress to date, especially given the ground-breaking nature of these technologies, much remains to be done to achieve the FCC's fundamental goal of having wireless 911 Phase II capabilities deployed throughout the country. It stressed that all necessary participants – carriers, the public safety community, technology vendors, network equipment and handset vendors, local exchange carriers, and the FCC – must continue to work aggressively in the coming months and years to ensure the promise of this new life-saving technology becomes a reality.

Background on Commission E911 Requirements

The Commission's wireless E911 rules seek to improve the effectiveness and reliability of 911 services by providing emergency services personnel with location information that will enable them to dispatch assistance to wireless 911 callers much more quickly. Most 911 calls from wireline phones today automatically provide the 911 call centers, or PSAPs, with the address or location of the telephone from which the call is placed. By contrast, PSAPs do not today receive that same information on 911 calls from wireless phones. Obtaining accurate location information for wireless calls is a much more difficult task given the highly mobile nature of wireless phones.

Because the deployment of final E911 solutions requires the development of new technologies as well as coordination among public safety agencies, wireless carriers, technology vendors, equipment manufacturers, and local exchange carriers, the FCC established a four-year rollout schedule of its Phase II requirements. The rollout of Phase II began October 1, 2001 and is to be completed by December 31, 2005. The Commission's E911 Fact Sheet, located on the FCC webpage, provides further guidance on the specific conditions and schedules of Phase I and II – www.fcc.gov/e911.

In September 2000, recognizing the complexities inherent in the deployment of these cutting edge technologies that require multiple parties to take coordinated action, the Commission provided specific guidance to any carriers, because of their special circumstances, to seek specific relief from its rules in order to implement Phase II. The Commission stated it expected any requests submitted to be specific, focused, and limited in scope, and that carriers should specify actions they intended to take to come into full compliance with FCC's rules. At that time, the Commission also approved a specific deployment plan for VoiceStream, a nationwide GSM carrier.

The Commission received more than 70 requests from wireless carriers seeking adjustments to the E911 Phase II deployment schedule, the accuracy standards, or both. All carriers seeking relief have submitted alternative compliance plans specifying how they intend to implement Phase II and to come into compliance with the Commission's rules.

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Action by the Commission October 2, 2001, by Order (FCC 01-293). Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin, with Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin issuing separate statements.

Actions by the Commission October 2, 2001, by Orders (FCC 01-294, FCC 01-296, FCC 01-297). Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy and Martin, with Commissioner Copps concurring and Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin issuing separate statements.

Actions by the Commission October 2, 2001, by Orders (FCC 01-295, FCC 01-299). Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy and Martin, with Commissioner Copps dissenting and Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin issuing separate statements.

Action by the Commission October 4, 2001, by Public Notice. Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin with Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin issuing separate statements.

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