



It is now possible to use certain wireless telephone services to send a text message to 911 if you are unable to make a voice 911 call, you can type your message on your wireless phone and send it to a 911 operator. **But even where text-to-911 is available, if you are able to make a voice call to 911, and if it is safe to do so, you should always make a voice call to 911 instead.**

The four largest wireless telephone companies (AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon) have voluntarily committed to make texting to 911 available

Asked Questions

What is text-to-911 and why would I want to use it?

It is the ability to send a "short message" (SMS) or other kind of text message to 911.

Texting during an emergency could be helpful if you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, or if a voice call to 911 might otherwise be dangerous or impossible. But if you are able to make a voice call to 911, and if it is safe to do so, you should always make a voice call to 911.

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.

How can I find out if my area has text-to-911 capability?

Ask your wireless phone company if text-to-911 is available in your area. You can also ask your state legislators or public safety officials if your local 911 center is prepared to accept text-to-911 messages. Public information lines, such as 211 or 311, also may have more information on text-to-911 service availability in your area

If text-to-911 is available in my area, what type of wireless phone or service do I need to send an emergency text?

Check with your wireless phone company. In general, you must have a text-capable wireless phone and a wireless service subscription or contract with a wireless phone company. You may also need a "wireless data plan." Remember, you can make a voice call to 911 using a wireless phone that does not have a service plan, but you cannot send a text message to 911 without a service contract that includes texting.

Can all cell phones send a text to 911?

Texting 911 is not available if you are roaming. You must have text included in your plan with a participating carrier to place a text to 911. Other variables, such as the type of phone you have, may also be a factor

What are the challenges with accepting 911 texts?

The 911 call center cannot identify the person's exact location. Additionally, it can take more time for a call taker to respond to a written text message.

Do emergency texts receive priority?

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

If I am able to text-to-911, will the 911 center automatically know my location?

Texting to 911 is different from making a voice call to 911 in this respect. When you make a voice call to 911, the call taker will typically receive your phone number and your approximate location automatically. This is called "Enhanced 911" or "E911." However, in most cases when you text 911 from a wireless phone, the call taker will not receive this automated information. For this reason, if you send a text message to 911, it is important to give the 911 call taker an accurate address or location as quickly as possible, if you can.

☒ Will the dispatcher know where the caller is when they text?

Not necessarily. In the first text to 911, the caller should include the location and type of emergency help needed. Texting to 911 is different from calling 911. When a call is placed to 911, the call taker will typically receive the phone number and the approximate location automatically. However, in most cases when a text is sent to 911 from a wireless phone, the call taker will not receive accurate location information. For this reason, when a text message to 911 is sent, it is important to give the 911 call taker an accurate address or location as quickly as possible.

If text-to-911 is available to me, why should I use it only when a voice call to 911 is not an option?

Voice calls to 911 are usually the most efficient way to reach emergency help. For example, voice calls allow the 911 operator to more quickly ask questions and obtain information from the caller, while two-way communication by text can take more time and is subject to limits on the length of text messages. In addition, when you make a voice call to 911, the call taker will typically receive your phone number and the approximate location of your phone automatically.

Does Text-to-911 replace regular 911 calls?

No; in fact, the FCC stresses that texting to 911 should be thought of only as a last resort, in the event that you can't speak. The FCC advises that people who are hard of hearing, deaf, or speech-impaired should still be encouraged to use TTY for calling when they can. You should always call 911 if you can. Sending a text to 911 may take longer than a voice call because the caller must enter the text, have it pass through the system, and then the 911 call taker has to enter a text response and send it back. Calling 911 is still the preferred method; the key thing to remember is ***Call if you can, text if you can't.***

Is it text-only? What about sending photos and video at a scene?

For the moment, Text-to-911 accepts written words only, though telecommunications agencies and companies are working toward Next-Generation 911, sometimes called NG911 for short. The goal is to modernize equipment and procedures at the emergency call centers (PSAPs), starting with photo messages and eventually including video messages as well. We're likely several years away from sending video messages to 911.

Why is texting important?

Texting to 911 is intended to benefit people who may not be able to speak due to an

emergency such as a home invasion or domestic incident, as well as individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities. Calling 911 in an emergency is still the preferred method to ask for help. Remember; *Call if you can, text if you can't*. **Never text and drive.**

What happens if someone texts a 911 call center that does not accept texts?

Anywhere that 911 text service is not currently available, wireless carriers have implemented an alert message warning anyone who sends a text that their 911 message was not received, and they should place a call to 911 instead. This is called a bounce-back message shown here.

Could there be technical issues?

As with all text messages, messages to or from 911 may have a delay, may get out of order or may not be received at all. Texting 911 is not available if you are roaming. You must have text included in your plan with a participating carrier to place a text to 911. Carriers treat text messages to 911 like any other text message, so your texts will be subject to the same service speeds or delays, depending on network strength in your area.

Can photos or video be sent from a scene? Not at this time, 911 can only accept text characters. Messages with pictures, videos or emoticons may not be received at all so please do not send pictures or video.

Can a text be sent in another language?

No. Text in English only – interpreters are not available for text at this time.

Is there an FCC regulation that requires 911 centers to accept text to 911?

At this time, the FCC has only placed a regulation on the wireless carriers to make text available. The deadline for the 4 major carriers (AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon) was May 15, 2014. Currently 911 centers are not required to accept text messages.

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.