

TEXT-TO-911: QUICK FACTS & FAQs



Today most consumers cannot reach 911 by sending a text message from their wireless phone. In limited areas of the United States, however, it is now possible to use certain wireless telephone services to send a text message to 911. This means that in such areas, 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.**

If you attempt to send a text to 911 where text-to-911 service is unavailable, you should receive an immediate "bounce-back" message that text-to-911 is not available and that you should contact emergency services by another means, such as by making a voice call or using telecommunications relay services (the latter for consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability).

FREQUENTLY 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.

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.

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.

• WHY ISN'T TEXT-TO-911 AVAILABLE EVERYWHERE IN THE COUNTRY?

Text-to-911 is a new capability. It is likely to become more widely available over time as 911 centers modernize their systems to accept text messages and request the service from text messaging providers.

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- **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.

- **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.