NEXT-GENERATION 9-1-1:
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO GETTING STARTED

Insights into Text-to-9-1-1 Implementation
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Insights into Text-to-9-1-1 Implementation
Next-Generation 9-1-1 has been on the minds of public safety professionals for many years, and for good reason. The nationwide migration to an entirely IP-based architecture is the most significant communication advancement the industry has ever taken on. As more and more public safety answering points (PSAPs) begin to take important strides toward their NextGen 9-1-1 goals, the emergency communications environment is primed to implement some of the newest next-generation capabilities available now. For many PSAPs, the most obvious next step is the integration of text-to-9-1-1 capabilities.
The importance of public safety text capabilities cannot be overstated. Today, texting is quickly becoming a primary means of communication worldwide. Over 90 percent of American adults own a mobile phone, and 80 percent of them send and receive text messages. Since 2008, U.S. mobile phone users send and receive more text messages than voice calls with totals reaching nearly six billion messages a day. For the deaf and hard-of-hearing population, texting has replaced TTY devices as the preferred means of communication simply because it is faster, easier and more universally available. In truth, texting has become a social norm in our country, yet it has not been broadly incorporated into emergency communications. However, there are widely held, yet incorrect, beliefs that texting to 9-1-1 is possible today. Of Americans polled on the topic, more than 52 percent said they believed they could access emergency help via a text message and 72 percent believed that it is important to have text-to-9-1-1 capabilities available. Unfortunately, the majority of these people would not receive help if they sent a text to 9-1-1. Despite the widespread movement toward NextGen 9-1-1, text-to-9-1-1 capabilities have only been implemented in a few select locations. However, with important engagement by the federal government, public safety industry associations and major wireless carriers, the reality is that text capabilities can be enabled now in PSAPs from coast to coast.

To help you take the necessary steps toward text implementation, this guide is designed to educate you on the current text-to-9-1-1 landscape, explain how text-to-9-1-1 works technically, offer insights into fundamental considerations before implementation, and show you how to get started. The implementation of this lifesaving service is available now, may require only minor technical upgrades and will have minimal impact on PSAP operations. By adding this important solution to your PSAP, you will be one step further down the NextGen 9-1-1 migration path, and you will be offering your citizens the most robust services that 9-1-1 has to offer today.

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While widespread implementation of text-to-9-1-1 capabilities is progressing, the timing has never been better than now to begin this important advancement. Currently, the industry is seeing proven text-to-9-1-1 solutions come to market concurrent with important federal initiatives and essential wireless carrier cooperation. Public safety is ready today with the right commercial developments and governmental input to make text-to-9-1-1 a successful addition to any PSAP operation. Like all areas of NextGen 9-1-1 migration, however, widespread text-to-9-1-1 implementation will not happen in one broad stroke, but requires time and measured steps to take hold nationwide.
Federal Communications Commission Action

On December 13, 2012, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) regarding text to 9-1-1, seeking comments on a variety of text-related issues. Comments were first pursued and subsequently led to guidance for all commercial wireless carriers and interconnected text service providers to provide automatic notification when a text message cannot be transmitted to a PSAP.

The FCC also sought comment on whether to require all commercial wireless carriers and interconnected text-over-the-top (IT-OTT) providers to:

- Implement text-to-9-1-1 service
- Enable roaming, routing and location services for text-to-9-1-1 services
- Provide PSAP options for receipt of text-to-9-1-1

Additionally, on May 17, 2013, the FCC released a Report and Order requiring all wireless carriers and IT-OTT providers to make available “bounce-back messages” by September 30, 2013. These messages are intended to alert consumers who try to text 9-1-1 in areas where text service has not been enabled that the service is not available.

While the FCC action is not a government mandate requiring PSAPs to implement text-to-9-1-1 service, it is the first step in preparing the necessary commercial communications entities for broad implementation as soon as individual PSAPs are ready, and further rulemaking activities may occur in the future.

For more information on bounce-back messages, see Chapter 3: Fundamental Considerations/Message Notifications.

Commitment of Wireless Carriers

At the same time, the four major U.S. wireless carriers—AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon—have voluntarily committed to make text-to-9-1-1 service available by May 15, 2014, in all areas served by their respective networks where local PSAPs have the technical capabilities to receive texts. This action is an important move for public safety. With the cooperation of wireless carriers, PSAPs can begin preparing their operations for text capabilities knowing that when they request service from the wireless carriers, the necessary network updates will be in place.
Development of Standards

As text capabilities begin to be implemented across the country, the importance of standards designed to ensure the smooth transition is indisputable. Comprehensive, well-defined standards are necessary to outline, guide and enable seamless cooperation between wireless carriers, Text Control Center (TCC) service providers, 9-1-1 text service providers and regional, state and federal agencies so that every element and every entity will align to deliver every text-to-9-1-1 to the appropriate PSAP in a timely manner.

Currently, short message service (SMS) messages are the basis of text-to-9-1-1 solutions. At some point in the future, SMS will give way to a next-generation version of messaging called multimedia messaging emergency service (MMES), which will allow for the sending and receiving of videos, pictures and other digital files. While SMS is not the final NextGen 9-1-1 solution, the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS) and the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) have approved a set of standards—J-STD-110—to guide the effective use of SMS as well as the seamless interface with the National Emergency Number Association’s (NENA) i3 architecture.

J-STD-110 and NENA i3 support a flexible and interoperable environment for multiple wireless carriers and public safety network configurations, and they define capabilities necessary to support text-to-9-1-1 as it functions today. J-STD-110 governs the text call flow from the point of text origination through the TCC, which is provided by the 9-1-1 service provider, in order to convert individual text messages into a next-generation protocol that enables the delivery of a text conversation to the appropriate PSAP. The TCC is the boundary line between the commercial network and the next-generation emergency services IP network (ESInet), which delivers the text message to the PSAP. Beyond the TCC, the text call flow is guided by the NENA i3 standards. These two sets of standards will work together to ensure an efficient pathway for text-to-9-1-1 messages until MMES is implemented nationwide, at which point NENA i3 will govern the entire text call flow.

For more information on text-to-9-1-1 call flow and the TCC, see Chapter 3: How Text-to-9-1-1 Works/Sending a text to 9-1-1.
Practical Scenarios for Text-to-9-1-1 Usage

There is universal agreement within the public safety community that a voice call is the best option for communicating with 9-1-1 in an emergency. However, there are certain situations in which a voice call is not possible or puts the caller in increased danger. In the following scenarios, a text-to-9-1-1 request for assistance may be more effective than a voice call:

- When one of the 38 million deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens of this country is in need of emergency assistance and is using a wireless phone.
- When it is not safe for a caller to be overheard making a request for emergency assistance, such as a kidnapping, domestic abuse or home invasion situation.
- During a voice network overload, such as a wide-scale natural or man-made disaster, large public unrest or regional power outage.
- When radio signal strength is weak, such as in a mountainous or wilderness area, text messages can often get through because text transmissions require less bandwidth than voice calls.

It is Happening Now

It is important to note that in the last year major wireless carriers have received over 600,000 attempted text-to-9-1-1 messages. It is likely that citizens in most PSAP jurisdictions have tried to contact 9-1-1 via a text message, but have received the mandated bounce-back message. Due to this alarming trend, some PSAPs have taken early steps to implement text capabilities where available even before all wireless carriers have come online. In many cases, these early implementers have not publicized the availability of the service. This soft-launch approach allows them to service those callers who do attempt to request emergency assistance via a text while optimizing their text capabilities before public expectation and text traffic begin to surge.
At surface level, sending a text-generated request for assistance is a simple and straightforward procedure that resembles the transmission of any other common text message. The caller inputs the designated three-digit short code, 9-1-1, keys in the emergency message, hits send and the message is delivered to a call taker’s monitor at the PSAP. Of course, like all modern technology advancements, below the surface is a different story. The list of entities and elements necessary to deliver that message is quite complex, and a basic understanding of the text call flow will help you determine the best text-implementation strategy for your PSAP operations.
Sending a Text to 9-1-1

The text-to-9-1-1 call flow begins with a caller, a mobile phone and a text-generated emergency message. Once the caller sends the message, the emergency text is routed through a short message service center (SMSC) to the appropriate TCC. The TCC queries the wireless carrier commercial location server to obtain the X,Y coordinates of the originating cell tower and queries the emergency call routing function (ECRF) to determine if there is a text-enabled PSAP in the jurisdiction. Once the location information and PSAP identification are collected by the TCC, the message is routed to the appropriate PSAP via the emergency services routing proxy (ESRP). It is important to note that the connection from the TCC to the PSAP could be through an ESInet or another IP network, such as the public Internet.

Once routed, the message is received at the PSAP on text-enabled call-handling equipment or on a separate monitor designated specifically for text-generated requests for assistance. When the PSAP receives the message, all call-taker positions are notified via a flashing button on the text-user interface and/or by an audio tone.

2.1 HOW TEXT-TO-9-1-1 WORKS
Options for Implementation

Like many aspects of NextGen 9-1-1, PSAPs have multiple options for how to implement text capabilities. In order to make the best choice for your operations, it is important to evaluate your existing technical environment, current and future needs and budget.

INTEGRATED CALL-HANDLING SOLUTION

The integrated call-handling solution is considered the most effective text implementation and best prepares PSAPs for future NextGen 9-1-1 capabilities. This i3-based solution allows a PSAP to receive and display text-to-9-1-1 calls in the same manner as voice calls. Text messages from all wireless carriers are displayed on the same user interface as voice calls, allowing call takers to seamlessly move between multiple text and voice calls without the need of additional monitors, keyboards or mice. The user interface typically provides the call taker with the originating cell tower location coordinates and identifies the originating wireless carrier. While voice and text calls arrive at the same console, overall voice capacity at the PSAP is not limited by text traffic because voice and text calls travel across separate networks.

This solution carries minimal operational impacts, but may require upgrades to existing call-handling equipment as well as a private secure IP connection over an ESInet to the text 9-1-1 service provider. Integration of text and voice calls may also require the expansion of internal management information systems (MIS) to capture text transcripts in the same way as recorded voice calls. This solution will prepare PSAPs for the future integration of text calls with computer-aided dispatch (CAD) systems that will allow for the display of emergency text messages on CAD workstations as well.

2.2 INTEGRATED CALL HANDLING

LOCATION INFORMATION

Provides call taker with text caller location coordinates and originating wireless carrier information.

TEXT DIALOG DISPLAY

Text messages are received and displayed on the same monitor as voice calls with no need for additional equipment.

MINIMAL OPERATIONAL IMPACT

Imposes minimal operational impact, but may require upgrades to existing call-processing equipment and additional network connectivity.
Options for Implementation (*continued*)

**WEB BROWSER**

The web-based browser solution is a text delivery method that routes messages via an ESInet or the public Internet to a web browser on an existing computer or computers within a PSAP. This solution provides the PSAP with two distinct display options.

The first option is an interoperable i3-based solution that allows all wireless carriers to send their text-to-9-1-1 messages over an ESInet or the public Internet to a unified web display within the PSAP.

The second option is a carrier-based web-browser solution. This solution is similar to the i3-based web browser in how the text message is displayed within the PSAP and provides a cost-effective option for PSAPs because this application is accessible via the public Internet with minimal set-up costs. It is important to note, however, that this solution does not allow for a unified display of messages from all carriers. Because each carrier could be connected to a different TCC, it is possible that you would need a designated web browser display for each individual carrier.

2.3 **WEB BROWSER**

**BROWSER BASED**

Text messages can travel over an ESInet or the public Internet to an existing computer or computers in a PSAP for a browser-based display.

**ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT**

Does not require a system upgrade, but may require a designated web display for text message handling.

**TRANSITIONAL APPROACH**

Provides an option for implementing text-to-9-1-1 in advance of CPE integration or full NextGen 9-1-1 capabilities.
TEXT-TO-TTY

The teletypewriter (TTY) has historically been used as a communication method for the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. Text-to-TTY converts text-to-9-1-1 messages into TTY Baudot\(^1\) tones that can be delivered over a PSAP’s existing voice circuits and TTY equipment. This option allows PSAPs to send and receive emergency text messages without upgrading any equipment; however, TTY is not recognized as a NextGen 9-1-1 solution and does pose significant usability issues for both the caller and the call taker. TTY is a half-duplex technology that does not allow text messages to be sent simultaneously by the caller and the call taker. It also has a limited character set, minimal transmission speeds and the potential for message garbling. Because of this, text interactions are prone to errors that can lead to confusion between the caller and call taker, and can take significantly longer than other text display methods. And because these text transmissions operate over the same voice trunks as voice calls and are longer than typical voice call interactions, text-to-TTY messages can tie up voice circuits, preventing other emergency calls from getting through to the PSAP.

2.4 TEXT-TO-TTY

\(^1\) A character set predating EBCDIC and ASCII, and the standard character set used in TTY communications.
Service Provider Interoperability

There are two distinct types of “service providers” involved in the routing and delivery of text messages to 9-1-1; TCC service providers and 9-1-1 text service providers. Further, there are multiple vendors who offer one or both of these services.

Currently, there are two primary TCC service providers in the U.S. marketplace. The TCC service provider plays a vital role in the call flow of all text-to-9-1-1 messages. They receive the individual text messages from the wireless carrier, determine the caller’s location, and create and manage a “conversation” with the appropriate PSAP based upon the location of that caller. Many of the wireless carriers have contracted with one or both TCC service providers to deliver the TCC functionality and PSAP routing capabilities.

On the receiving end, individual PSAPs and regional entities depend upon 9-1-1 text service providers to collect, route and consolidate text messages from all carriers in their jurisdiction into a single stream that can be displayed on the appropriate PSAP call-handling equipment, regardless of the delivery method within the PSAP. There are several vendors acting as 9-1-1 text service providers.

In keeping with the federal plan for a nationwide Next-Generation 9-1-1 architecture, the TCC service providers and 9-1-1 text service providers have agreed to implement interfaces that exchange text messages based on NENA i3 and ATIS J-STD-110 standards. This approach will allow interoperability between different providers, allowing PSAPs to receive all text to 9-1-1 messages on one display technology versus needing multiple display methods for multiple service providers.

2.5 SERVICE PROVIDER INTEROPERABILITY
Much like the migration to Next-Generation 9-1-1, the road to text-to-9-1-1 implementation will vary by PSAP. While it is important to assess your existing technical environment, your current and future needs as well as your budget, there are certain fundamental considerations that will benefit any PSAP pursuing text capabilities.
The Cost of Implementation

The path to text-to-9-1-1 implementation will be different for every PSAP as will the cost of implementing this service. It will be important to assess your existing technical and operational environment as well as your current and future NextGen 9-1-1 plans in determining your budget for the service upgrade. PSAPs have various display and connection options for text-to-9-1-1 capabilities that provide ways to customize your service to meet budgetary requirements.

For more information on display and connection options, see Chapter 2: How Text-to-9-1-1 Works/Options for Implementation.

Message Notifications

The typical time required for a text message to travel from a PSAP to an emergency caller is 3-5 seconds, not including the time it takes to actually type the message. However, text-to-9-1-1 services can be established to incorporate automatic predefined messages for more accurate and efficient response. The messages are configured by the PSAP to meet the specific needs of each operation. In the case of a home invasion, when a voice call may not be safe, the predefined message might be “Get to a safe place. Police are on their way.” Text-to-9-1-1 service will also include automatic bounce-back messages that inform the caller if text service is not available and direct them to contact 9-1-1 using another means, such as a voice call or TTY service.

For more information on automated messages, see Chapter 3: Fundamental Considerations/Operational Impacts.

3.1 BOUNCE-BACK MESSAGE

[Diagram of text-to-9-1-1 process]

1. SMS MESSAGE TO TCC
2. QUERY LBS FOR LOCATION INFORMATION
3. X,Y COORDINATES SENT TO TCC
4. BOUNCE-BACK MESSAGE IS SENT
Operational Impacts

The introduction of any new capability will inevitably impact the way in which a PSAP functions. When text capabilities first entered the public safety conversations on NextGen 9-1-1 features and functionality, there was some concern that text communication could overwhelm call takers. Today, initial deployments of text-to-9-1-1 service have demonstrated that this is not the case. Early-adopting PSAPs have indicated that text capabilities have not imposed any significant operational difficulties.

Because text messages travel over separate parallel networks to voice calls—except in the case of TTY—there is no threat of overloading essential voice networks, even when using an integrated or web-browser solution. Extensive trials and pilot programs have resulted in low text volumes—approximately one in 1,000 calls. With the movement of the major wireless carriers to provide text service and a growing awareness of the service, significant growth in text communication is expected, but will likely happen at a manageable pace.

With certain text message configurations, it is possible that a single call taker could handle multiple simultaneous text calls. While the idea of carrying on multiple interactions at the same time may be intimidating to some call takers, it is important to note that the 9-1-1 call taker remains in complete control of their call volume at all times. The number of messages that a call taker can accept at one time will vary by PSAP based on individual policies and procedures.

Additionally, depending on the PSAP’s chosen delivery method and call-handling equipment, texts can be easily transferred from one call taker to another without the need to convey call history. Because the entire thread of a text conversation can be forwarded at once, the receiving call taker has the ability to read the conversation and understand the scenario quickly while the original call taker can immediately move on to another voice or text call without explanation.

As with any new capability, training is essential. Because broad text-to-9-1-1 implementation is in its infancy, operational procedures and training programs are still being developed. Despite the limited access to precedence, it will be extremely important to create customized operational procedures and training programs, including the detailed development of use cases, that reflect the unique environment and specific needs of individual PSAPs.
The path to text-to-9-1-1 implementation will vary by individual PSAP; however, there are basic steps that every PSAP should adhere to in order to ensure a smooth transition.
Current Operating Environment

The implementation of text capabilities in a PSAP does not require a monumental system overhaul, but most PSAPs will require some minimal technical upgrades. This type of technical readiness will require the input of your CPE vendor and 9-1-1 text service provider, but will not need to involve your wireless carrier or their TCC service provider. Once you have a committed near-term date when your system will be ready to receive text messages, you can make a Request For Services (RFS) with the wireless carriers in your area.

In order to make the right choices for your operations, it is important to begin with a comprehensive assessment of your current operating environment that should include a determination of your preferred delivery solution, the number of call-taker positions that will be text enabled and an identification of possible connectivity options. This final assessment should include existing private network connectivity (e.g. MPLS) or a vendor-specific virtual private network (VPN).

For more information on how to assess your operating environment, see Resources/Checklist to Get Started.

Carrier Readiness

Despite the fact that most wireless carriers have been providing commercial text capabilities for many years, text-to-9-1-1 services have only recently become a priority. As stated earlier, the four major carriers—AT&T, Sprint, Verizon and T-Mobile—have voluntarily committed to provide text-to-9-1-1 service no later than May 2014. For PSAPs serviced by one of these carriers, an RFS may be submitted as soon as you have a committed near-term date that your operating environment will be ready to receive text messages. While text service is not a federally mandated initiative, the movement of the tier 1 carriers is setting the stage for the entire industry. PSAPs not serviced by a tier 1 carrier should also begin work to prepare operations for text implementation, as many regional carriers have also begun the process and are selecting their TCC service providers.

For more information on the movement of tier 1 wireless carriers, see Chapter 1: The Text Landscape Today/Commitment of Tier 1 Wireless Carriers.
Request for Service

A formal RFS to a wireless carrier that has current text-to-9-1-1 service is the final step toward PSAP text readiness. Your request should be consistent with the following industry recommendation:

“…valid PSAP request for Text-to-9-1-1 service will be implemented within a reasonable amount of time of receiving such request, not to exceed six months. A request for service will be considered valid if, at the time the request is made: a) the requesting PSAP represents that it is technically ready to receive 9-1-1 text messages in the format requested; and b) the appropriate local and State 9-1-1 service governing authority has specifically authorized the PSAP to accept and, by extension, the signatory service provider to provide, text-to-9-1-1 service (and such authorization is not subject to dispute.)”

For an RFS template that can be used to guide your request for service, see Resources/RFS Template.

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1 BFCC EAAC, Resolution regarding Text Messaging to 911 (adopted March 30, 2012) (recommending Text Messaging to 9-1-1, at a minimum, via SMS); and Presentation of EAAC Working Group 1, Text-to-911 Solutions to 911 Interim to NG911 (Sept. 14, 2012) (outlining key assumptions about Pre-NG911 Interim Text to 911).
CONCLUSION

With the nationwide migration to an IP-based emergency communications network well underway, now is the time for PSAPs to begin planning for the next-generation capabilities available with this new architecture. Due to important movement by the federal government and the voluntary cooperation of tier 1 wireless carries, text-to-9-1-1 is the obvious next step for many PSAPs. Implementing this essential capability is possible today with minimal technical upgrades and manageable operational impacts, allowing PSAPs to give their citizens a safe, secure and reliable way to request emergency assistance when a voice call to 9-1-1 is not possible or safe.
Additional References

For additional reference material on text-to-9-1-1, please visit the following websites:

**NATIONAL EMERGENCY NUMBER ASSOCIATION (NENA):**
http://www.nena.org/news/124922/

**ALLIANCE FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS (ATIS):**
http://www.atis.org/PRESS/pressreleases2013/040213.asp

**THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION:**
http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7022119543&bcsi_scan_a99bbceef8499a5f=GEj0-Vh8fCQW/q4cM0OrO+w0x/VLLAAAyb8HXg==

**MISSION CRITICAL MAGAZINE:**
The following checklist can help you get started today by guiding you through the initial phases of text-to-9-1-1 implementation. It is important to keep in mind that every implementation will be unique, and you should carefully consider the individual circumstances and characteristics of your agency and jurisdiction as you begin this important step toward your Next-Generation 9-1-1 goals.

☐ Determine if your wireless service provider is capable of providing text-to-9-1-1 service.

☐ Choose your preferred implementation option: Integrated Call-Handling, Web Browser or Text-to-TTY.

☐ Select a back-up failover PSAP to which text-generated requests for assistance will be rerouted in the event of an operational outage.

☐ Choose a text service provider who will guide your operational readiness.

☐ Determine connectivity options: e.g. existing MPLS or vendor-specific VPN.

☐ Submit an RFS to your wireless service provider after readiness is established.

☐ Develop a customized operational procedures and training program that reflects your unique environment and specific needs.
REQUEST FOR SERVICE

<Director Name>
<PSAP Name>
<PSAP Address>

<Date>

<WSP Contact>
<WSP Company Name>
<WSP Address>

Dear <WSP Contact>,

<PSAP Name> has implemented the necessary upgrades to our E9-1-1 system to allow the receipt of 9-1-1 SMS text messages (text-to-9-1-1) from the public. We wish to formally request that your company begin sending live SMS short code 9-1-1 text traffic to our PSAP via our 9-1-1 text service provider, <9-1-1 Text Service Provider Name>. <PSAP Name> is requesting that <WSP Company Name> schedule a planning meeting or conference call within the next 30 days to kick off the deployment process.

We look forward to working with you.

Regards,

<Director>
<PSAP Name>

CC: <State 9-1-1 Coordinator or State Board>
Acknowledgments

John Snapp, Vice President, Senior Technical Officer
Tim Auen, Director, Product Management
Anne DeGraff, Senior Program Manager
Nicole Leonard, Senior Product Manager
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