



# Public Safety Communications



## Text – to – 911 Information for Public Safety Stakeholders

We want you to know that as of November 15, 2015, Public Safety Communications began accepting text messages to 911 (sms), for customers of the four major wireless carriers (AT&T, Sprint, Verizon & T-Mobile), along with Cricket and US Cellular.

This move made PSC one of about 400 (out of approximately 6,000) Public Safety Answering Points in the nation to voluntarily offer “Text to 911”.

You probably haven’t heard about this because we’ve intentionally made it a ‘soft launch’, with only limited/targeted outreach audiences, including the Deaf & Hard of Hearing Community, as well as the Domestic Violence advocacy.

A ‘soft launch’ was intentional, so as to allow our department to make sure; A) it worked, and; B) to refine related policy and procedures; and C) work out bugs, before announcing it county wide.

Making sure public safety knows about text-2-911 is our next step.

Our primary message to the public is this, while Text-to-911 is now available, it is not intended to replace a voice call to 911. Our motto is, “**911: Call if you can, Text if you can’t.**” A voice call to 911 remains the quickest, most efficient way to reach emergency help in Dane County.

### Text-to-911 is intended for:

- *Any person who is deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired.*
- *Any situation where a person could be in danger if someone hears them placing a voice call (for example, domestic violence or home invasion situations).*
- *Persons in an area with poor cell coverage where a voice call may not work.*
- *Persons in a high background-noise environment who cannot get to a quiet spot safely.*
- *Persons with a medical emergency who cannot engage in a voice conversation.*

**Limitations and Reminders:** Please keep the following in mind when sending a text to 911:

1. **Deactivated cellphones can’t text 911**, you must have service, and a texting plan in order to Text-to-911.
2. **To text 911**; type 911 in the “To” field (no spaces or dashes) and begin the message.
3. **Providing location information and nature of the emergency in the first text message is critical**, since Public Safety Communications will only receive an approximate location for you from your cell phone.
4. **Text-to-911 should only be used for emergency** situations that require an immediate response from police, fire or emergency medical services. Other problems should still be called in to the 911 Center’s non-emergency line: 255-2345. TTY and receipt of relay (TRS & VRS) messages are still available for the deaf and hard-of-hearing or speech impaired.
5. Short message service (SMS or basic text messaging) has a 160-character limit per text.
6. **Text abbreviations or slang should never be used** as it can confuse the 911 call taker and potentially delay emergency response.
7. Because Text-to-911 uses existing cellular towers within Dane County to route the text to the 911 Center, **if a person sends a text in a county border area, the text may be routed to another county**, just like a wireless voice call to 911. If the other county does not provide Text-to-911, the

**9-1-1: Call if you can, Text if you can’t.**

person will receive a 'bounce back' message advising them that Text-to-911 is not available and to place a voice call to 911.

8. **Roaming is currently not supported for Text-to-911.** Therefore if a customer does not have wireless coverage within Dane County they will receive a bounce back message from their provider advising them to place a voice call to 911.
9. **Foreign language translation via text message is not currently supported.**

The technology we're currently using to receive text messages is considered an interim solution, and is essentially a website which receives text messages delivered to PSC over the public internet. The application alerts a call taker, provides basic (=/  
phase I quality), allows for 'canned' messages, and stores the messages.

In the event we loose our connection to the internet, a person attempting to reach PSC via sms would receive a 'bounce back' message advising them to voice call 911.

This interim solution will be integrated into a planned (likely this year) replacement telephone system, which also removes the need for internet, and makes the connection more robust.

### **IMPORTANT REMINDERS**

#### **How to text 911 in an emergency:**

- Enter the numbers "911" in the "To" field; (no hyphens; no spaces)
- The first text message to 911 should be brief and contain the location of the emergency and type of help needed;
- Push the "Send" button;
- Be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 911 call taker;
- Text in simple words – do not use abbreviations;
- Keep text messages brief and concise.

#### **Below are a few things to know if you need to text 911:**

- Text location information is not equal to current location technology;
- As with all text messages, 911 messages *can* take longer to receive;
  - can get out of order.
  - may not be received at all.
- Text-to-911 is not available if you are roaming;
- A text or data plan is required to place a text-to-911;
- If texting to 911 is not available in your area, or is temporarily unavailable, you will receive a message indicating that texting 911 is not available and to contact 911 by other means;
- Photos and videos should not be sent to 911 at this time;\*
- Text-to-911 cannot include more than one person. Do not send your emergency text to anyone other than 911;
- Foreign language translation is not supported at this time.

\* Some carriers (Sprint/US Cell) do allow pictures/videos

\* Process is cumbersome/time consuming

\* No process currently in place to share media with responders

**Please contact PSC if you have any questions.**

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