911 Wireless Services

The number of 911 calls placed by people using wireless phones has significantly increased in recent years. It is estimated that about 70 percent of 911 calls are placed from wireless phones, and that percentage is growing. For many Americans, the ability to call 911 for help in an emergency is one of the main reasons they own a wireless phone.

Unique challenges posed by wireless phones

While wireless phones can be an important public safety tool, they also create unique challenges for emergency response personnel and wireless service providers. Since wireless phones are mobile, they are not associated with one fixed location or address. While the location of the cell site closest to the 911 caller may provide a general indication of the caller's location, that information is not always specific enough for rescue personnel to deliver assistance to the caller quickly.

Tips for 911 calling

Consumers making a 911 call from a wireless phone should remember the following:

- Tell the emergency operator the location of the emergency right away.
- Provide the emergency operator with your wireless phone number, so if the call gets disconnected, the emergency operator can call you back.
- PSAPs currently lack the technical capability to receive texts, photos and videos.
- If your wireless phone is not "initialized" (meaning you do not have a contract for service with a wireless service provider), and your emergency call gets disconnected, you must call the emergency operator back because the operator does not have your telephone number and cannot contact you.
- To help public safety personnel allocate emergency resources, learn and use the designated number in your state for highway accidents or other non life-threatening incidents (States often reserve specific numbers for these types of incidents. For example, "#77" is the number used for highway accidents in Virginia.)
- Refrain from programming your phone to automatically dial 911 when one button, such as the "9" key, is pressed. Unintentional wireless 911 calls, which often occur when auto-dial keys are inadvertently pressed, cause problems for emergency call centers.
- If your wireless phone came pre-programmed with the auto-dial 911 feature already turned on, turn this feature off (consult your user manual for instructions).
- Lock your keypad when you're not using your wireless phone to help prevent accidental calls to 911.
- Consider creating a contact in your wireless phone's memory with the name "ICE" (In Case of Emergency), which lists the phone numbers of people you want to have notified in an emergency.

Ask about your handset's E911 capabilities

When replacing your handset, ask about E911 capabilities. Some providers may offer incentives to encourage customers without location-capable phones to obtain new location-capable phones. Some providers may choose to prevent reactivation of older handsets that do not have E911 capability, or

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they may adopt various other measures. If a provider declines to reactivate a handset that is not location-capable, the FCC still requires the provider to deliver a 911 call from that handset to the appropriate PSAP.

Wireless 911 rules

As part of our efforts to improve public safety, the FCC has adopted rules aimed at improving the reliability of wireless 911 services and the accuracy of the location information transmitted with a wireless 911 call. The improvements help providing Public Safety Answering Points with meaningful, accurate location information from wireless 911 callers in order to dispatch local emergency responders to the correct location and to provide assistance to 911 callers more quickly.

The FCC's wireless 911 rules apply to all wireless licensees, broadband Personal Communications Service licensees and certain Specialized Mobile Radio licensees. Mobile Satellite Service providers, however, are currently excluded.

The FCC's basic 911 rules require wireless service providers to transmit all 911 calls to a PSAP, regardless of whether the caller subscribes to the provider's service or not.

Phase I Enhanced 911 (E911) rules require wireless service providers to provide the PSAP with the telephone number of the originator of a wireless 911 call and the location of the cell site or base station transmitting the call.

Phase II E911 rules require wireless service providers to provide more precise location information to PSAPs; specifically, the latitude and longitude of the caller. This information must be accurate to within 50 to 300 meters depending upon the type of location technology used.

The FCC recently required wireless carriers to provide more precise location information to PSAPs. As a result, wireless carriers will be required to comply with the FCC's location accuracy rules at either a county-based or PSAP-based geographic level. The new standards apply to outdoor measurements only, as indoor use poses unique obstacles.

Compliance

Wireless service providers are required to file with the FCC a list of counties, or portions of counties, that they seek to exclude from the location accuracy requirements. The FCC permits exclusions only where wireless carriers determine that providing location accuracy is limited, or technologically impossible, because of either heavy forestation or the inability to triangulate a caller's location. Wireless carriers must report any changes to their exclusion lists within 30 days of such changes. The exclusion lists and changes must be reported in the record of the FCC's docketed proceeding addressing location accuracy, PS Docket No. 07-114 (http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/proceeding/view?name=07-114), which is publicly available online.

Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

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