



‘Call When You Can... Text When You Can’t’

Introducing Statewide Text to 9-1-1 in New Jersey

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Piscataway, New Jersey – For the first time, New Jersey residents can text to 9-1-1 whenever and wherever they encounter an emergency in the State – thanks to collaboration among cellular providers, local and county emergency dispatch units, the State Police, Rutgers University, federal officials, and the New Jersey Office of Emergency Telecommunications Services (OETS).

OETS, a unit of the New Jersey Office of Information Technology (NJOIT), took the lead in organizing this innovative effort, said Dave Weinstein, New Jersey’s first Cabinet-level Chief Technology Officer and the leader of NJOIT.

“There is perhaps no greater reason than public safety for government to keep pace with today’s technology trends,” Weinstein said. “Every citizen now has an alternative, ubiquitous communication channel for interacting with emergency services personnel.”

In cooperation with a Federal initiative, four of the largest cellular companies provided the software and interfaces. With this text-to-9-1-1 capability, all dispatchers needed was a properly configured computer, a secure Internet connection and a short training session, Weinstein said. By late July, each of the State’s 21 counties had a central dispatch for text messages, Weinstein said.

When Texting Beats Calling

Attorney General Christopher Porrino said text messaging adds powerful capabilities to the universal 9-1-1 calling system that New Jersey residents have used with gratifying results for more than 30 years.

“There are circumstances in which people witnessing suspicious activity, people in danger, or people desperately in need of medical help cannot talk – but are able to text,” Porrino said.

In most emergency situations, 9-1-1 dispatchers prefer taking calls rather than texts, Porrino said. (Hence the national slogan for Text to 9-1-1, “Call When You Can, Text When You Can’t.”) Calling allows information to be collected faster than texting, saving precious seconds in an emergency. Texting should be reserved for those times when calling just isn’t possible, he said.

When citizens find it’s unsafe to talk, or for those with hearing impairment, texting is the right option and will save lives, said Chris Rodriguez, Director of New Jersey’s Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, and David Alexander, Director of the New Jersey Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing.





“Texting to 9-1-1 may be the only safe way to reach help in active shooter situations such as the recent night club shooting in Orlando,” Rodriguez said. “All the phone user has to do is type the numbers 911 in the address line and include an address, and help will be summoned as quickly as possible.”

A Better Day for People With Hearing Impairment or Speech Disorders

“The new ‘Text-to-9-1-1’ system being announced today achieves the goal of making 9-1-1 fully accessible to everyone,” Alexander said. “For the first time in history, people who are unable to speak or hear on a phone can communicate directly with a 9-1-1 dispatcher using text messaging. There is no longer any need for people with hearing loss or speech disorders to use specialized equipment or third party relay services to contact 9-1-1 as required in the past.”

Rutgers University and the New Jersey State Police are proud of their roles in bringing text to 9-1-1 to hundreds of thousands of State residents, said Rutgers Police Chief Kenneth Cop and Major David Brady of the State Police. State Police are providing Text-to-9-1-1 dispatch to some New Jersey counties. Rutgers University, in addition to serving the more than 50,000 students, faculty and staff in Rutgers’ New Brunswick community, also is providing service for the more than 828,000 residents of Middlesex County.

“Text to 911 is a step forward in public safety technology in New Jersey,” Cop said. “Rutgers is pleased to partner with the State of New Jersey to provide this service to the residents of Middlesex County and the members of the university community.”

The Office of Emergency Telecommunications Services at NJOIT provides the following advice on texting to 9-1-1 for students and others who use cellphones to seek help during emergencies:

- **How do I send a text to 9-1-1?**
 1. Open the message app on your phone or wireless device
 2. In the “To” field type “911” with no punctuation
 3. In the message field, type the location, (address and municipality) and a brief description of the problem (e.g., 1234 E Main St Franklin Twp I hear someone breaking in)
 4. Then press “Send”

Be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 9-1-1 call taker. Keep text messages brief and concise.

- **When should you text 9-1-1?**
 - If you have a speech or hearing impairment. It is recommended that you inform 9-1-1 that you are speech or hearing impaired so that they can inform the responders.
 - If speaking may cause you harm, such as a break-in or domestic violence situation.
Remember to silence your phone so that the sound of 9-1-1 replying does not give you away.



- If peer pressure is strong. You are with a group and some of the members are doing something dangerous or illegal.
- If a lack of service makes it impossible to make a voice call, you may be able to get data service to send a text message.
- **Do Not** attempt to send videos or photos with your texts. Limit your messaging to text only. Be as specific as possible when providing your location. Provide as much of the following information as possible:
 - Exact address to include unit/apartment number and city
 - Business name
 - The names of both streets at the nearest intersection
 - Landmarks

Once the texting session is initiated, **do not exit the conversation** until the 9-1-1 operator has told you to do so. Text-to-9-1-1 cannot include more than one person. Do not copy your emergency text to anyone other than 9-1-1. Wait until you are safe to notify others of your situation. Translation services for text-to-9-1-1 are not available; please text in English only.

