

Richmond County 911 Text-to-911 Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Text-to-911 needed now?

Simply put, text messaging is one of the primary ways people communicate today, especially younger generations and members of the hearing and speech disabilities community. According to Forrester Research, an estimated 6 billion messages are sent every day in the United States. The 911 community is constantly working to meet the evolving needs of the public.

What are the benefits of Text-to-911?

There are many significant benefits to consumers, especially in cases when the caller cannot communicate verbally. For example, Text to 9-1-1 will be very useful to the approximately 34 million Americans who are hard of hearing, deaf, or speech-impaired. Texts to 9-1-1 could also aid in situations when a crime is in progress, the caller is facing domestic abuse, is injured and can't speak, and other situations.

How to text 9-1-1 in an emergency:

- Enter the numbers "911" in the "To" field;
- 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 and be aware of if you need to text 9-1-1:

- *Always call 911 if you can.*
- 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, or may not be received.
- 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.
- Texts sent to 911 have the same 160 character limit as other text messages
- Photos and videos cannot 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.
- **Do not text and drive!**

Should I Call or Text 911?

The rule of thumb is always “Call if you can, text if you can’t.” Residents should only text 911 when calling is not an option.

I am part of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Do we need to do anything different to now text 911?

No, all you need is a text capable phone with a data plan.

I use a Pre-paid wireless service. Will I be able to text 911?

Some Pre-paid services may work via major providers, such as AT&T, Verizon, Sprint, T-Mobile. Others are required to provide this capability by December 31, 2014. Pre-paid consumers will have to consult with Pre-Paid phone vendors to determine if they are able to text-to-911. This may depend on the package that is purchased by the consumer.

Do emergency texts receive priority?

Cell providers treat messages to 911 like any other text message, so your texts will be subject to the same service speeds and or delays, depending on network strength in your area.

Will Richmond County 9-1-1 know the location of the individual texting 911?

Richmond County 9-1-1 will receive the cell tower location, provider, and phone number in this process. Providers will only be providing limited information. As they expand these capabilities, this information should become more accurate. With all emergency interactions Richmond County 9-1-1 will verify the location within the first few seconds of contact.

Will the text conversation drop as a person moves between cell tower locations?

No. The “caller/texter” is connected to the 911 center until Richmond County 9-1-1 releases the conversation. Depending on the cellular provider, delays with text messages could be experienced.

Can my text be transferred to another agency just like my phone call can?

No. Richmond County 9-1-1 takes text messages and calls the appropriate agency. This will help to reduce missed text and avoid confusion.

Will I be able to send pictures to 911 of an accident or suspicious activity during an emergency text? If not, when will this be available?

No. Providers such as AT&T, Verizon, Sprint, and T-Mobile only support standard alphanumeric text messages with no multimedia attachments like audio, pictures, or video. Providers are working to allow for multimedia texts in the future.

Will Richmond County 9-1-1 be able to translate text in Spanish or another foreign language?

No. Individuals texting in Spanish or other foreign languages will be directed to call 911. In the event the person is unable to call, Richmond 9-1-1 will contact our translation provider for assistance.