

What You Need To Know About Calling 911 From Your Wireless Phone

The FCC thinks it is important for consumers to know more about calling 911 from a wireless phone. In some areas, 911 operators automatically receive the phone number or location of a wireless call, but in many areas, that is not yet the case. Technology that will provide that information— Enhanced 911 or “E911” — is currently being implemented, but is not yet available in many wireless phones or most parts of the country. Though a great deal of progress has been made over the past year, some wireless carriers and some state and local governments have invested more than others in bringing this life-saving technology to consumers.

Find out whether E911 has been deployed where you live and work so you will know how much information you need to be prepared to give a 911 operator. If E911 is not yet available in your area, make sure to tell the emergency dispatchers your phone number and where you are. Inform yourself about the current capabilities of your wireless service.

Ask your wireless carrier –

Have you received a request from local public safety officials to deploy E911 in my area?

What is the status of your E911 deployment in my area?

Does my phone work for E911? What other models work for E911?

Ask your state legislators and public safety officials –

Is my local 911 call center ready for E911?

If not, what is the plan for making the necessary upgrades?

Is the E911 surcharge on my bill being used for E911?



Implementing E911 Technologies

The deployment of E911 is complicated and requires expensive upgrades to local 911 call centers (“Public Safety Answering Points” or “PSAPs”) and coordination among wireless carriers, equipment vendors and manufacturers, and state and local public safety agencies. The FCC’s E911 rules require the wireless carriers to implement in two phases. **“Phase I”** enables emergency personnel to know the wireless phone number of the caller and which communications tower is transmitting the call, which greatly narrows the potential area of search. **“Phase II”** provides more specific location information on the whereabouts of the caller.

Carriers may satisfy the Commission’s requirements by choosing either a **“handset”** solution or a **“network”** solution, and you should know which solution your carrier has chosen.

A **handset** solution involves enhanced GPS capability in the phone itself. Under FCC rules, carriers using handset-based solutions need to pinpoint wireless 911 callers to 50 meters for 67% of their calls and to 150 meters for 95% of their calls. Of the major wireless carriers, Verizon Wireless, Sprint PCS, Nextel, and ALLTEL have chosen a handset solution. ***If you subscribe to one of these carriers, find out whether your phone has E911 location capabilities.***

A **network** solution involves base stations -- towers and antennae -- in the carrier’s network to measure the timing of signals emitted from the phone, and the location capability is located primarily in the network, not in the phone. Under FCC rules, carriers using network-based solutions need to pinpoint wireless 911 callers to 100 meters for 67% of their calls and to 300 meters for 95% of their calls. Of the major wireless carriers, AT&T Wireless, Cingular, and T-Mobile have chosen a network solution. ***If you subscribe to one of these carriers, it is not necessary to have a particular model of phone for E911 to work.***

In either case, your wireless carrier and your phone are only half the equation. Your state and local government also must devote the resources to upgrade your state’s 911 call centers. Consumers need to be fully informed about both halves of the E911 equation.

For additional information on Wireless Enhanced 911 (E911), contact the FCC’s Consumer Call Center toll free at: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice, 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY or visit our Web site at www.fcc.gov/911enhanced.

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print, or audio) please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an e-mail to FCC504@fcc.gov.

To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission’s electronic subscriber service, click on www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservic.html.

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