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Commission Requires Interconnected VoIP Providers to Provide Enhanced 911 Service

Order Ensures VoIP Customers Have Access to Emergency Services

Washington, D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission today took steps to protect consumers by requiring that certain providers of voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) phone service supply enhanced 911 (E911) emergency calling capabilities to their customers as a mandatory feature of the service.

The IP-enabled services marketplace is the latest new frontier of our nation's communications landscape, and the Commission is committed to allowing IP-enabled services to evolve without undue regulation. But E911 service is critical to our nation's ability to respond to a host of crises. The Commission hopes to minimize the likelihood of situations like recent incidents in which users of interconnected VoIP dialed 911 but were not able to reach emergency operators. Today's Order represents a balanced approach that takes into consideration the expectations of consumers, the need to strengthen Americans' ability to access public safety in times of crisis, and the needs of entities offering these innovative services.

The Order places obligations on interconnected VoIP service providers that are similar to traditional telephone providers in that they enable customers to receive calls from and terminate calls to the public switched telephone network (PSTN). It does not place obligations on other IP-based service providers, such as those that provide instant messaging or Internet gaming services, because although these services may contain a voice component, customers of these services cannot receive calls from and place calls to the PSTN. The Order adopted today reaches the following conclusions:

- Interconnected VoIP providers must deliver all 911 calls to the customer's local emergency operator. This must be a standard, rather than optional, feature of the service.
- Interconnected VoIP providers must provide emergency operators with the call back number and location information of their customers (i.e., E911) where the emergency operator is capable of receiving it. Although the customer must provide the location information, the VoIP provider must provide the customer a means of updating this information, whether he or she is at home or away from home.

- By the effective date, interconnected VoIP providers must inform their customers, both new and existing, of the E911 capabilities and limitations of their service.
- The incumbent LECs are required to provide access to their E911 networks to any requesting telecommunications carrier. They must continue to provide access to trunks, selective routers, and E911 databases to competing carriers. The Commission will closely monitor this obligation.

Interconnected VoIP providers must comply with these requirements, and submit to the Commission a letter detailing such compliance, no later than 120 days after the effective date of the Order.

Finally, the Commission stated its intention to adopt, in a future order, an advanced E911 solution that includes a method for determining the customer's location without the customer having to self report this information.

Action by the Commission May 19, 2005, by First Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 05-116). Chairman Martin, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps, and Adelstein, Chairman Martin, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps, and Adelstein issuing separate statements.

WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-196

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