



NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

News Media Information 202-418-0500
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

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See *MCI v. FCC*, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

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NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Matthew Berry, 202-418-2005
Email: Matthew.Berry@fcc.gov

**STATEMENT OF FCC COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI
REGARDING THE ONGOING INQUIRY INTO CONSUMERS' ABILITY TO REACH
EMERGENCY PERSONNEL WHENEVER THEY DIAL 911**

Earlier this year, I started an inquiry to determine how we can ensure that whenever someone dials 911 from a hotel, motel, or office building, he or she can reach emergency personnel.¹ Like many others around the country, I was moved to act when I learned about the tragic death of Kari Rene Hunt Dunn in Marshall, Texas.

My inquiry began with our nation's hotel industry. In March, I reported my initial findings regarding the status of 911 calling at lodging properties and the steps the industry is taking to ensure that someone who dials 911 will reach emergency personnel directly.²

Now, there is more news to share regarding the lodging industry's efforts. For instance, when I launched this inquiry, the Wyndham Hotel Group reported that only 80% of its owned and managed properties allowed direct 911 dialing. Since then, Wyndham reconfigured the telephone systems at the remaining 20% of its properties, and it now reports that every one of its owned and managed properties allow direct access to 911. Similarly, Hyatt initially reported that only 75% of its managed properties allowed direct 911 access, but it now reports that it provides this functionality at 99% of those properties and expects to reach 100% within a few weeks. I applaud these efforts.

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AH&LA) is also continuing to play an important role in solving this problem. AH&LA has now issued an industry-wide recommendation that encourages all of its members to move to direct 911 dialing. AH&LA is also hosting an industry-wide webinar on the issue this week, which will provide lodging properties with information about the changes necessary to enable direct 911 dialing. I look forward to continuing to work with AH&LA and am confident that more hotels will implement direct 911 dialing.

I also expanded my inquiry beyond the lodging industry back in March because this isn't just an issue for hotels. Multi-line telephone systems (MLTS) are used in the office buildings where Americans work and the schools where our children learn, among many other places. To address the problem on this broader scale and to ensure that the lodging industry has the tools it needs to continue to close the gap, the vendors and manufacturers of MLTS must play a role. That's why I sent letters to the CEOs of the

¹ See Statement of FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai on the Importance of Connecting Americans to Emergency Personnel Whenever They Dial 911 (Jan. 13, 2014), <http://go.usa.gov/9DxJ>.

² See Remarks of Commissioner Ajit Pai at the 9-1-1 Goes to Washington Conference (Mar. 24, 2014), <http://go.usa.gov/9DjA>; see also Summary of Commissioner Ajit Pai's Remarks at the 9-1-1 Goes to Washington Conference (Mar. 24, 2014), <http://go.usa.gov/9DDY>.

leading suppliers of MLTS products and services. I wanted to know whether there are any barriers, technical or otherwise, to ensuring direct access to 911.

Here's an update on what I learned from the MLTS vendor community. On the positive side, the responses show that all of the MLTS products currently offered by these companies can be configured or re-configured to allow consumers to reach emergency personnel when they dial 911. That is, they can be set up so that no access code is required when a consumer dials 911. In some cases, this is the default setting that is pre-programmed into the product. For example, ShoreTel Inc. and Vertical Communications both report that direct 911 dialing is the default setting for their MLTS products. I think that is the right approach.

On the other hand, the default setting on some MLTS requires the use of an access code to reach 911. In still other cases, MLTS ship with no default 911 setting, and they are configured based on the purchaser's preferences. But importantly—and regardless of the default setting—every company indicates that its current products can be configured or re-configured in the field to either permit or disallow direct dialing.

In my letters, I asked the MLTS companies to provide data on the number and percentage of their products that are not configured to allow direct access. Unfortunately, all of the companies reported that they did not have access to this information since the end users or premises owners can change or modify those settings without the vendor's knowledge.

However, the MLTS companies reported that, from a technical perspective, it should be simple to make the necessary changes to allow direct 911 dialing where the function is not enabled. In many cases, they report that system configurations can be modified either remotely or on-site—though many of the companies recommend that the modifications be made on-site so that appropriate testing can be done to ensure that the changes are made correctly.

I am also pleased to report that some MLTS companies are already taking action to help solve this problem in response to my inquiry. For example, NEC currently has four MLTS platforms. Two of them support direct 911 dialing as a default setting, while the other two support it only as a recommended setting. But in response to my letter, NEC states that it now plans to include direct 911 calling as the default setting in all four of its MLTS platforms. I commend this decision.

Moreover, some MLTS companies report that they have started offering no-cost software upgrades that will enable systems already deployed in the field to provide direct 911 calling. Avaya, for example, reports that it is encouraging its partners to provide a “911 checkup” service for its MLTS customers. It also notes that TelServe, Inc., CSDnet, Inc., and DJJ Technologies have started offering programs that would perform this service at no charge. Avaya is also taking a number of steps to raise the profile of this issue and to educate the MLTS community regarding the importance of configuring U.S. systems to allow direct 911 calling. Vertical similarly indicates that it is sending alerts to the channel partners that install its MLTS systems.

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In light of the data I've gathered from the MLTS and lodging communities, I now have a better sense of the scope and nature of the direct dialing issue. And the bottom line is this: There does not appear to be any technical reason why modern MLTS systems can't allow direct access to emergency personnel. And it shouldn't cost much to eliminate any access code requirement for existing systems, although it may require technical expertise and coordination with MLTS manufacturers or vendors.

Getting this information was a critical step, and I am grateful for the progress that has already been made. But there is more to be done. In the coming weeks, I will continue to work with the MLTS community, the lodging industry, and other stakeholders to ensure that there are solutions in place both for already-deployed MLTS systems and for new products that are being deployed.

My goal in this endeavor remains the same: We must continue our efforts to close the MLTS gap and ensure that every time someone calls 911 they reach emergency personnel that can help.