



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## ST. CROIX COUNTY IMPLEMENTS “TEXT-TO-911” SERVICE

The St. Croix County Emergency Support Services announces the implementation of “Text-to-911” service at its Emergency Communications Center. The county’s centralized 9-1-1 Dispatch center handles all emergency calls in the County and will immediately be able to process “Text2911” calls, as they are known in the industry, according to Emergency Support Services Director Stephen J. T’Kach. Three of the four major wireless carriers began testing service this past spring, including Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile, and Sprint just completed system tests within the last ten days. St. Croix County is the first public-safety dispatch center in the State of Wisconsin to implement this service for emergency calls. “That was quite a surprise to me,” said T’Kach, who ordered the service his first week on the job in January, “whatever we can do to save lives and improve the emergency services we offer to our citizens, we will.”

“Certainly there are situations where voice communications is simply not practical,” T’Kach added, “such in certain natural and man-made disasters, heavily congested wireless networks, in remote locations with weak radio signals, but perhaps most likely, in unsafe circumstances when a voice call to 9-1-1 could put someone in greater danger; a domestic abuse or an active shooter situation comes instantly to mind.” During the shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007, many students attempted to text 9-1-1 as they hid from the shooter on campus -- but their texts never went through because Text2911 was not supported at the time. On the other hand, during the January 2015 terrorist shooting attack at the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, an employee hiding in a cardboard box was able to text police with valuable information that is believed to have accelerated the law enforcement response.

T’Kach cautioned that texting 9-1-1 is not the best way to obtain emergency services and that calling 9-1-1 and speaking with a dispatcher is still the quicker and more efficient way to obtain help, so callers should make voice phone calls instead of texting whenever possible. “When a caller speaks to a 9-1-1 dispatcher operator over the phone, the dispatcher can infer more information from the caller’s tone of voice and potentially hear things in the background. In addition, when a voice phone call comes in through 9-1-1, the dispatcher automatically gets some information about where the caller is located for a faster response. This does not happen when a text call is made to 9-1-1, so it will be critical for text to 9-1-1 callers to provide the dispatcher with the exact location of where they are and the nature of the emergency assistance they need.”

Text calls to 9-1-1 are sent like any other text message, using “911” as the called number. The call will be routed by the wireless company to the closest 9-1-1 center, so it is possible a text call made close to the county border could be routed to an adjoining dispatch center. If a caller tries to text 9-1-1 in an area in which it is not currently supported, they will receive a “bounce-back” message, warning the caller that his or her text did not go through to an emergency call center.

The County specifically asked that callers not test this service. “Dispatchers already have enough emergency calls to keep them busy,” T’Kach advised, “they do not need prank calls to 9-1-1, particularly text calls which are labor intensive.” It is against the law in Wisconsin to make a prank call to 9-1-1, and that includes prank text calls to 9-1-1, as well.