

FCC seeks comment on NG911

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Last Thursday, the **Federal Communications Commission** adopted and released a **notice of proposed rulemaking** for the deployment of text-to-911, next generation 911 (NG911) applications, and an NG911 framework. The goal of this notice is to “accelerate the development and deployment of next generation 911 technology that will enable the public to send emergency communications to 911 public safety answering points (PSAPs) via text, photos, videos, and data ...” While many states and localities are working to implement NG911 technology that will eventually be able to receive texts and videos, even those that have NG911 systems installed cannot take full advantage of the technology. In most cases, these systems are not fully-featured NG911 systems; they are “NG911-ready” systems, which means that the infrastructure is in place to eventually support add-ons that will allow for the receipt of videos and texts.

At present, only a few communities involved in trial programs, such as **Durham, N.C.**, have full access to this technology. As stated during the Texas Commission on State Emergency Communications’ August 9 board meeting, the majority of states and communities’ NG911 systems are “capable of handing live calls, but will not be capable of handling text messaging, yet. Text messaging is one of many advance features that can be added, once the infrastructure [is] in place.” Texas is currently under negotiation for its Emergency Services IP Network (**ESInet**) project, which will provide the installation of the basic infrastructure as well as the necessary hardware, software and system training to make the state NG911-ready.

Once fully operational, NG911 systems will have the ability to revolutionize how first responders approach and respond to emergency situations. Through enabling texting capabilities, people who currently cannot call 911 due to the nature of the emergency (e.g. they are hiding during a break in and do not want to alert the robber to their location) will have the ability to access the assistance they need. Video will mean that paramedics can view medical conditions and the emergency scenario, whether it be a fire or a car accident, before they arrive on the scene. This will help them ensure they bring all of the proper equipment, including that which may not be standard such as oxygen masks for pets. It will also allow dispatchers to verbally relay basic emergency care procedures prior to EMS arriving.

This notice of proposed rulemaking asks for guidance on several issues, including:

- Determining what role the FCC should play in facilitating and/or accelerating the implementation of text-to-911
- Making recommendations on the regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to ensuring the implementation of NG911
- Providing a cost-benefit calculus of different regulatory options to determine the proper role for the commission in the implementation of NG911
- Reviewing the different types of communication currently available including Short Message Service (SMS), IP-based messaging and Real-Time Text (RTT) to determine their strengths and limitations and whether the capabilities should be included in text-to-911
- The potential for downloadable apps for consumers and PSAPs to “support capabilities for an early roll-out of text and multimedia functionality”

- Making a determination about whether NG911 traffic be prioritized, either on a regular basis or during large-scale disasters
- Determining the path toward integration and standardization of NG911 systems including how or whether to ensure uniform timeframes for different providers in implementing ESNets and Internet Multimedia Subsystem (IMS)

Analyst's Take:

The notice is open for comment for 60 days after it is published in the Federal Register. This period provides vendors an opportunity to shape the regulatory environment that they will ultimately be held accountable to. Vendors should look at this as an opportunity to influence the FCC in the same way they work with localities prior to the release of a solicitation to ensure requirements favor their company. This is their chance to promote their technologies and lobby for fewer or more regulations. Not only should cell phone carriers review this notice, but companies that have the ability to implement IP systems and companies interested in developing applications to be used on the system should review as well. The number and variety of potential applications are endless and include applications that provide medical records and applications that may be able to develop a direct chat system to operate between dispatchers and callers. Through commenting on the various sections of this notice, vendors have a unique opportunity to shape the regulatory environment in which they will be operating and ensure their proprietary technology becomes standard. At the very least, they can work to establish timeframes they are sure they can meet and thereby ensure they are not pushed out of the market due to noncompliance.