



Highlights of [GAO-06-338](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

“Enhanced 911” (E911) service refers to the capability of public safety answering points to automatically receive an emergency caller’s location information. An industry association estimates that nearly 82 million 911 calls are placed each year by callers using mobile phones. Wireless E911 technology provides emergency responders with the location and callback number of a person calling 911 from a mobile phone. The ENHANCE 911 Act of 2004 called for GAO to study state and local use of funds collected for the purpose of wireless E911 implementation. We are reporting on (1) the progress made in implementing wireless E911 services throughout the country, (2) the states and localities that have established taxes, fees, or charges for wireless E911 implementation, and (3) the states or localities that have used funds collected for the purposes of wireless E911 for unrelated purposes. To address these issues, we surveyed state-level E911 contacts on the collection and use of E911 funds. Of the 51 state E911 contacts (including the District of Columbia) who were asked to participate in our survey, we received 44 responses.

We provided the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) with a draft of this report and FCC provided technical comments that we incorporated.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-338.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. To view selected results of the survey, go to <http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-400sp>.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

States’ Collection and Use of Funds for Wireless Enhanced 911 Services

What GAO Found

Significant progress has been made towards implementing wireless E911 throughout the country since our November 2003 report. Deployment of wireless E911 usually proceeds through two phases: Phase I provides general location information by identifying the cell tower or cell site that is receiving the wireless call. Phase II provides more precise caller-location information, within 50 to 300 meters in most cases. We reported in November 2003, that nearly 65 percent of the more than 6,000 public safety answering points nationwide were capable of receiving Phase I information with wireless 911 calls and 18 percent had implemented Phase II wireless E911 with at least one wireless carrier. Currently, according to the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), nearly 80 percent of public safety answering points are capable of receiving Phase I location information and 57 percent have implemented Phase II for at least one wireless carrier. However, based on our survey results, full implementation is still several years away in many states. In response to our survey, three state E911 contacts reported that it will take more than 5 years to have wireless E911 completely implemented in their states, and five others said that the technology might never be fully implemented in their states.

Based on our survey results and NENA data, we found that nearly all states—48 states and the District of Columbia—require the wireless carriers to collect surcharges from their subscribers to cover the costs associated with implementing wireless E911. Responses to our survey showed the per-subscriber surcharges ranged from \$0.20 to \$3.00 per month. The two states that do not impose surcharges fund E911 through general revenue or the state’s Universal Service Fund, which was established to support various telecommunications programs. States have the discretion to determine how they will manage and distribute the funds and we found the management of the funds and methods of disbursement varied. According to our survey results, many of the states that responded have written criteria on the allowable uses of E911 funds. Allowable uses of the E911 funds include purchasing equipment upgrades and software packages.

Four state E911 contacts responded to our survey that their states did not use all of the funds collected for E911 on E911 implementation purposes during 2005. Six states, and the District of Columbia, did not respond to our survey so we do not know whether those states used E911 funds or made them available for other purposes. Four other states reported that they were unsure if all E911 funds were used solely for E911 purposes because the funds are collected and managed at the local level. The four states that reported that E911 funds were made available or used for purposes not related to E911 indicated that the E911 funds were transferred to their state’s general fund. For example, one state told us that E911 funds were transferred to the general fund to help balance the state budget. Another state reported that some E911 funds were transferred to the state police since they answer emergency calls in some areas of the state.