

Background

The number of 911 calls placed by people using wireless phones has radically increased. Public safety personnel estimate that about 50 percent of the millions of 911 calls they receive daily are placed from wireless phones, and that percentage is growing.

For many Americans, the ability to call 911 for help in an emergency is one of the main reasons they own a wireless phone. Other wireless 911 calls come from “Good Samaritans” reporting traffic accidents, crimes or other emergencies. Prompt delivery of these and other wireless 911 calls to public safety organizations benefits the public by promoting safety of life and property.

Unique Challenges Posed by Wireless Phones

While wireless phones can be an important public safety tool, they also create unique challenges for public safety and emergency response personnel and for wireless service providers. Because wireless phones are mobile, they are not associated with one fixed location or address. A caller using a wireless phone could be calling from anywhere. While the location of the cell site closest to the caller may provide a very general indication of the caller’s location, that information is not usually specific enough for rescue personnel to deliver assistance to the caller quickly.

The FCC’s Wireless 911 Rules

As part of its efforts to improve public safety, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has adopted rules aimed at improving the reliability of wireless 911 services and the accuracy of the location information transmitted with a wireless 911 call. Such improvements enable emergency response personnel to provide assistance to 911 callers much more quickly.

The FCC’s Wireless 911 Rules (cont’d.)

The FCC’s wireless 911 rules apply to all wireless licensees, broadband Personal Communications Service (PCS) licensees, and certain Specialized Mobile Radio (SMR) licensees. Here are the specific requirements.

Basic 911 rules require wireless service providers to:

- transmit all 911 calls to a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), regardless of whether the caller subscribes to the provider’s service or not.

Phase I Enhanced 911 (E911) rules require wireless service providers to:

- within six months of a valid request by a PSAP, provide the PSAP with the telephone number of the originator of a wireless 911 call and the location of the cell site or base station transmitting the call.

(More)
→



The FCC's Wireless 911 Rules (cont'd.)

Phase II E911 rules require wireless service providers to:

- within six months of a valid request by a PSAP, provide more precise location information to PSAPs; specifically, the latitude and longitude of the caller. This information must be accurate to within 50 to 300 meters depending on the type of technology used.
- by September 11, 2012, provide even more precise location information, specifically, information accurate to the closest PSAP. The FCC established a five year phase-in period for this requirement to allow wireless service providers more time to develop this capability. Wireless service providers must report to the FCC annually on their progress in supplying this more accurate location information for PSAPs with Phase II E911 capability.

Compliance

Wireless service providers may comply with certain FCC E911 rules by ensuring that 95 percent of their customers' handsets are E911-capable (also referred to as location-capable). The FCC's rules permit providers to choose how they will meet this requirement. Some providers may provide incentives to encourage customers without location-capable phones to obtain new, location-capable phones. For example, they may offer location-capable handsets at a discount. Some providers may choose to prevent reactivation of older handsets that don't have E911 capability, or may adopt various other measures.

If a provider declines to reactivate a handset that is not location-capable, the FCC requires the provider to still deliver a 911 call from that handset to the appropriate PSAP.

Compliance (cont'd.)

The provider, however, may not be able to accurately and automatically determine your location for the PSAP. Therefore, when replacing your handset, you should always ask about the new handset's E911 capabilities.

Tips for 911 Calling

The FCC's 911 rules for wireless service providers are being implemented over a period of several years. In addition, cities and states must update their PSAPs to receive caller identification and location information, a costly effort that can take several years to complete. Therefore, consumers that call 911 from a wireless phone should remember the following:

- Tell the emergency operator the location of the emergency right away.
- Give the emergency operator your wireless phone number so that, if the call gets disconnected, the operator can call you back.
- If your wireless phone is not "initialized" (meaning you do not have a contract for service with a wireless service provider), and your emergency call gets disconnected, you must call the emergency operator back because the operator does not have your telephone number and cannot contact you.
- To help public safety personnel allocate emergency resources, learn and use the designated number in your state for highway accidents or other non life-threatening incidents. Often, states reserve specific numbers for these types of incidents. For example, "#77" is the number used for highway accidents in Virginia. The number to call for non life-threatening incidents in your state can be found in the front of your phone book.

(More)
→



Tips for 911 Calling (cont'd.)

- Refrain from programming your phone to automatically dial 911 when one button, such as the “9” key, is pressed. Unintentional wireless 911 calls, which often occur when auto-dial keys are inadvertently pressed, cause problems for emergency call centers.
- If your wireless phone came pre-programmed with the auto-dial 911 feature already turned on, turn off this feature. Check your user manual to find out how.
- Lock your keypad when you’re not using your wireless phone. This action also prevents accidental calls to 911.

Also, consider creating a contact in your wireless phone’s memory with the name “ICE” (in Case of Emergency) listing the phone numbers of people you want to be notified if there is an emergency.

Filing a Complaint with the FCC

If you have a problem completing a 911 call from your wireless phone, first try to resolve the problem with your service provider. If you can’t resolve it directly, or if you think your wireless service provider is not complying with FCC wireless 911 requirements, you can file a complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint. You can file your complaint using an on-line complaint form found at esupport.fcc.gov/complaints.htm. You can also file your complaint with the FCC’s Consumer Center by e-mailing fccinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
 Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
 Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
 445 12th Street, S.W.
 Washington, DC 20554.

What to Include in Your Complaint

The best way to provide all the information the FCC needs to process your complaint is to complete fully the on-line complaint form. When you open the on-line complaint form, you will be asked a series of questions that will take you to the particular section of the form you need to complete. If you do not use the on-line complaint form, your complaint, at a minimum, should indicate:

- your name, address, e-mail address, and phone number where you can be reached;
- the name of the company that you’re complaining about; telephone number involved, account number, date of incident, and description of the problem.

For More Information

For more information about the FCC’s wireless 911 rules, visit the FCC’s wireless 911 Web site at www.fcc.gov/pshs/services/911-services. For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC’s Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb, or contact the FCC’s Consumer Center using the information provided for filing a complaint.



###

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print, or audio), please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an e-mail to FCC504@fcc.gov.

To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, visit www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

10/08/08*

