

Media Advisory – February 6, 2012

Contact: Christopher Schwarzen

Office: 425-388-3883

Email: Christopher.Schwarzen@snoco.org

Dial 9-1-1 to reach emergency assistance

Need help fast? Dial 9-1-1.

Local 9-1-1 officials are reminding residents to call, not text, when they have an emergency. While the ability to include text messaging options for 9-1-1 reporting is being tested, reliable methods still don't exist, and text messages to 9-1-1 in most parts of the country, including Snohomish County, can't be received.

Voice calls to 9-1-1 automatically route to the closest emergency call center based on where the call is made, and there is an immediate confirmation with the 9-1-1 operator that the call has been received. Texting technology doesn't yet provide specific location information and there is no way for the sender to confirm their text was received.

Since 2010, Snohomish County has invested more than \$2 million in 9-1-1 equipment upgrades using local 9-1-1 excise tax revenues. With the state's Emergency Services IP Network (ESI-Net), Snohomish County's 9-1-1 centers have been able to move away from aging circuit-based systems.

In January, the last of the county's 9-1-1 centers migrated to the ESI-Net, creating a much more reliable 9-1-1 phone system that allows quicker call transfers to other dispatch centers, especially during disasters. Such improvements also help lay the foundation for receiving text when the time comes.

"We have made some very important upgrades to our system that will benefit Snohomish County residents for years," said Laura Caster, Snohomish County's E9-1-1 Office Manager.

"We are eager to embrace texting technology, but only when we know it is ready and as reliable as dialing 9-1-1," says SNOFAC Executive Director Kurt Mills. "There are some significant concerns at present including the inability of text service providers to guarantee immediate delivery of a text to 9-1-1 emergency call centers."

In August 2011, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced a five-step plan for making texting to 9-1-1 centers a reality, but that plan is still in the early stages. Snohomish County is watching carefully as 9-1-1 texting and related projects are developed and tested around the United States.

"It's especially important for the younger generation to realize you can't text 9-1-1," said SNOCOM Executive Director Debbie Grady. "What is second nature for many young Americans just isn't an option yet. Parents need to make sure their children still know that they must dial 9-1-1 for emergency assistance."

Special systems such as TDD/TTY (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) have been in place for years for the hearing-impaired community and those remain fully integrated into Snohomish County 9-1-1 systems.

SNOPAC & SNOCOM are the two primary 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Points serving Snohomish County with support from the Snohomish County Enhanced 9-1-1 Office.

For more information on 9-1-1 systems in Snohomish County, contact SNOCOM's Executive Director Debbie Grady at 425-775-5201; SNOPAC's Executive Director Kurt Mills at 425-407-3911, or Snohomish County's E9-1-1 Office Manager Laura Caster at 425-388-3886.

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