

# Talking Points & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) For Snohomish County Public Safety Agencies

## Background

Text to 911 will be available soon for emergencies in Snohomish County. While placing a call to 911 is still the preferred method to ask for help, there are times when a voice call is not possible and a text to 911 becomes the best way to ask for help. The details below help explain the very important reasons how text-to-911 can benefit our community as well as its current limitations.

## Key Messages

- All 911 centers in Washington are currently working to prepare to accept text to 911, but the service is not yet available state-wide.
- Only certain carriers are currently supporting Text to 911. These include AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon. Depending on the technology and device being used, customers of other carriers may also be able to send a text to 911. Customers should contact their carriers directly to determine if they can text 911.
- The preferred method for contacting 911 in an emergency is still to call. Texting 911 is intended for people who are not able to speak due to an emergency such as a home invasion or domestic incident, as well as individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities. ***Call if you can, text if you can't*** is the message.



## FAQs

- **Why is texting important?**  
Texting to 911 is intended to benefit people who may not be able to speak due to an emergency such as a home invasion or domestic incident, as well as individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities. Calling 911 in an emergency is still the preferred method to ask for help. Remember; ***Call if you can, text if you can't***. **Never text and drive.**
- **Does text to 911 replace regular 911 calls?**  
No. You should always call 911 if you can. Sending a text to 911 may take longer than a voice call because the caller must enter the text, have it pass through the system, and then the 911 call taker has to enter a text response and send it back. Calling 911 is still the preferred method; the key thing to remember is ***Call if you can, text if you can't***.
- **When will Text to 911 be available state-wide?**  
Availability of Text to 911 service is coming and in various stages of implementation around the state, however Snohomish County is one of the first counties in Washington State to offer Text to 911. To implement emergency texting, 911 call centers state-wide need the proper equipment, software and training which will take some time so an exact date is not available.

- What are the challenges with accepting 911 texts?**  
The 911 call center cannot identify the person's exact location. Additionally, it can take more time for a call taker to respond to a written text message.
- Can all cell phones send a text to 911?**  
Texting 911 is not available if you are roaming. You must have text included in your plan with a participating carrier to place a text to 911. Other variables, such as the type of phone you have, may also be a factor.
- What happens if someone texts a 911 call center that does not accept texts?**  
Anywhere that 911 text service is not currently available, wireless carriers have implemented an alert message warning anyone who sends a text that their 911 message was not received, and they should place a call to 911 instead. This is called a bounce-back message shown here.

Please make a voice call to 911. There is no text service to 911 available at this time.
- Will the dispatcher know where the caller is when they text?**  
Not necessarily. In the first text to 911, the caller should include the location and type of emergency help needed. Texting to 911 is different from calling 911. When a call is placed to 911, the call taker will typically receive the phone number and the approximate location automatically. However, in most cases when a text is sent to 911 from a wireless phone, the call taker will not receive accurate location information. For this reason, when a text message to 911 is sent, it is important to give the 911 call taker an accurate address or location as quickly as possible.
- Could there be technical issues?**  
As with all text messages, messages to or from 911 may have a delay, may get out of order or may not be received at all. Texting 911 is not available if you are roaming. You must have text included in your plan with a participating carrier to place a text to 911. Carriers treat text messages to 911 like any other text message, so your texts will be subject to the same service speeds or delays, depending on network strength in your area.
- Can photos or video be sent from a scene?**  
Not at this time, 911 can only accept text characters. Messages with pictures, videos or emoticons may not be received at all so please do not send pictures or video.
- Can a text be sent in another language?**  
No. Text in English only – interpreters are not available for text at this time.
- Will this cost the public more money?**  
No. The 911 system is funded by a fee that is already included in your phone service fees.
- Is there an FCC regulation that requires 911 centers to accept text to 911?**  
At this time, the FCC has only placed a regulation on the wireless carriers to make text available. The deadline for the 4 major carriers (AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon) was May 15, 2014. Currently 911 centers are not required to accept text messages.

**Question? Please contact SNOPAC Executive Director Kurt Mills, 425-407-3911.**