

Text to 9-1-1

Frequently Asked Questions



What is text to 9-1-1 and why would I want to use it?

Text to 9-1-1 is a new capability in the Phoenix metro area (Maricopa Region 9-1-1). It is the ability to send a text message to 9-1-1. Texting during an emergency could be helpful if you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, or if a voice call to 9-1-1 might otherwise be dangerous or impossible. ***But if you are able to make a voice call to 9-1-1, and if it is safe to do so, you should always make a voice call to 9-1-1.***

What type of wireless phone or service do I need to send an emergency text?

Check with your wireless phone company. In general, you must have a text-capable wireless phone and a wireless service subscription or contract with a wireless phone company. You also may need a wireless data plan. Remember, you can make a voice call to 9-1-1 using a wireless phone that does not have a service plan, but you cannot send a text message to 9-1-1 without a service contract that includes texting.

What languages can I use?

At this time, text must be in English. There is currently no language interpretation for text available. It remains in development.

If I am able to text to 9-1-1, will the 9-1-1 center automatically know my location?

Texting to 9-1-1 is different from making a voice call to 9-1-1. In most cases when you text 9-1-1 from a wireless phone, the call taker ***will not*** receive automatic location information. For this reason, if you send a text message to 9-1-1, it is important to give the 9-1-1 call taker an accurate address or location as quickly as possible, if you can.

If text to 9-1-1 is available to me, why should I use it only when a voice call to 9-1-1 is not an option?

Voice calls to 9-1-1 are usually the most efficient way to reach emergency help. For example, voice calls allow the 9-1-1 operator to more quickly ask questions and obtain information from the caller, while two-way communication by text can take more time and is subject to limits on the length of text messages. In addition, when you make a voice call to 9-1-1, the call taker will typically receive your phone number and the approximate location of your phone automatically.

What are the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) rules on 9-1-1?

The FCC's 9-1-1 rules require the following:

- Wireless phone companies must transmit all 9-1-1 voice calls to 9-1-1 centers (also known as Public Safety Answering Points, or PSAPs).
- Wireless phone companies and other text messaging providers must deliver emergency texts to PSAPs.
- If a PSAP requests text to 9-1-1 service, text messaging providers must deploy the service in that area within six months.
- Wireless phone companies, as well as certain text messaging applications, must provide automated "bounce-back" messages in instances when you attempt to send a text message to 9-1-1 in an area where text to 9-1-1 service is unavailable. The bounce-back messages will inform you that text to 9-1-1 is not available and direct you to contact emergency services by another means, such as by making a voice call or using telecommunications relay services.
- The FCC does not have authority to issue rules regulating 9-1-1 centers, and so it cannot require these centers to accept text messages.