

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Greater Harris County
9-1-1 Emergency Network

Largest 9-1-1 System in Texas Phases in Text-to-9-1-1 Service

9-1-1: Call if You Can, Text if You Can't Voice Calls to 9-1-1 Are Still the Best and Fastest Way To Contact 9-1-1

Greater Harris County 9-1-1 Emergency Network (GHC 9-1-1) announced today that it has begun phasing in text-to-9-1-1 service for its territory—49 cities and two counties (Harris and Fort Bend). Verizon Wireless and T-Mobile customers can now send a short message to 9-1-1 in an emergency. Text to 9-1-1 should only be used in an emergency situation, when someone is unable to speak: For instance, if the caller is deaf, hard-of-hearing, speech impaired, or when speaking out loud would put the caller in danger.

In the interest of public safety, GHC 9-1-1 officials want to ensure that its large community of wireless customers understand how to text to 9-1-1 in an emergency. GHC 9-1-1 is committed to providing the most technologically advanced 9-1-1 service available. “As far as we know, this is the largest major metropolitan area in the country to provide this service,” said Lavergne Schwender, executive director of GHC 9-1-1 “We are pleased to offer this for those who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or speech impaired so they can communicate with emergency services in their main form of communication as well to those in an emergency situation who cannot speak.”

1. If there is an emergency and you are unable to make a voice call, remember these steps:

- Know your location - Text your exact location
- Text what you need – Text what emergency help is needed.
- Be clear - Send a short text message without abbreviations or slang.
- Stay Calm - Answer questions and follow instructions from the 9-1-1 call taker.

2. Don't Abuse 9-1-1—Text-to-9-1-1 service is **ONLY** for emergencies.

- It is a crime to text or call 9-1-1 with a false report. Prank texters can be located.

3. The text-to-9-1-1 service will have many challenges.

- As with all text messages, messages to 9-1-1 may take longer to receive, may get out of order, or may not be received at all.
- 9-1-1 call takers will not be able to hear any background noise that could help with assisting during the emergency.
- Voice calls are real-time communication and text-to-9-1-1 is not.
- **Text-to-9-1-1 service is only available in some areas of the State, and by some wireless carriers in Texas and the U.S.**

If someone sends a text to 9-1-1 from outside of Harris and Fort Bend Counties or from a wireless carrier without text-to-9-1-1 service, they should receive a bounce-back message saying that text 9-1-1 is not available and to contact 9-1-1 by other means. This service is being implemented in phases, and is anticipated to be available for customers of all four carriers by the end of October, 2014.

GHC 9-1-1 is the largest 9-1-1 system in Texas and one of the largest in the U.S., providing service to nearly 5.2 million residents. www.911.org

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