

# Text-to-911 Now Available in Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Department of Public Safety announces the launch of Text-to-911, a service that provides additional accessibility to the E-911 Uniform Emergency Telephone System.

Anyone in need of emergency assistance can now send a text message to 911 using a mobile phone to report a police, fire or medical emergency. The Rhode Island E-911 Communication Center will respond to text messages and notify the appropriate authorities to respond.

**NOTE: sending a text to 911 may not be as quick or efficient as calling 911. This service should be used only by individuals who cannot place a voice call to 911 and need another way to seek emergency assistance.**

Sending a text message to 911 should be only used in emergency situations when a person is physically unable to place a voice call to 911 or does not want to be heard placing a call for help.

This option will be helpful for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, who will no longer need extra TTY (Teletypewriter) equipment or third-party assistance when contacting 911. It also could be life-saving in certain situations, such as those involving domestic violence or other crimes of violence.

## **If you need 911, call if you can – text if you can't.**

To send a text to 911, use the text message feature on your mobile phone.

Type the numbers **911** (no spaces or hyphens) into the field labelled **TO** or **RECIPIENT**.

- **PROVIDE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE EMERGENCY**
- **SPECIFY EXACT LOCATION – STREET NAME AND NUMBER AND CITY OR TOWN**
- **KEEP TEXT MESSAGE UNDER 140 CHARACTERS**

Professional telecommunicators in the E-911 Communication Center will respond to your text with questions to help determine the specific nature of the emergency and the type of assistance you require. They also may provide specific instructions for you to follow.

The E-911 telecommunicators will share this information with the appropriate local agency, which will dispatch police, fire and/or rescue crews to your location.

**Note:** It is important to provide your exact location when sending a text to 911 since telecommunicators may not be able to identify the specific location of a person sending a text to 911, which they usually are able to do when someone calls 911.

Requesting assistance by texting 911 also may take longer than a voice call to 911 because the telecommunicator must receive the text, enter the information into the computer system, and respond to the text and repeat this procedure for any follow-up text messages. This could impact response times, which is a critical consideration in a life-threatening situation.

**REMINDER: Sending a text message to 911 should be used only when placing a voice call to 911 is not an option. There is no guarantee that a text message will be sent or received in a timely manner – if at all.**

## **Limitations and Restrictions**

Text-to-911 service is available throughout Rhode Island. If cell phone service is not available in your area or if your text does not go through, you should receive notification from your carrier advising you that the text message was not delivered and instructing you to contact 911 using other means.

Text-to-911 is only available for use on mobile phones equipped with text or data plans. It uses a technology known as short message service, or SMS, which allows for short texts of 140 characters or less. Longer messages may not get delivered properly. Do NOT send multi-media pictures, videos, emoticons or other non-text files.

Text-to-911 is not available for use with third-party texting applications on mobile devices that do not support texting to and from US telephone numbers; on apps that only allow texting between other users of that app; or on text messages sent through social media. It also is not available for use when using computers or other mobile devices to send text messages. It can only be used with mobile phones.

The Text-to-911 option does not provide the same location tracking capabilities that a phone call provides. It may not be able to accurately pinpoint the location of the person sending the text, so it is imperative to include information about your exact location when sending a text to 911. Be advised that the system is not equipped to provide continuous location tracking during an exchange of texts, so it is important to notify the telecommunicators if your location changes after the initial text.

<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Call 911 if you can; text if you can't</li><li>• Keep text message short – no more than 140 characters</li><li>• Provide a brief description of your emergency</li><li>• Give your EXACT location</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Don't contact 911 unless it's an emergency – police, fire or medical</li><li>• Don't include pictures, videos or emoticons in text messages to 911</li><li>• Don't use abbreviations or slang in text messages to 911</li></ul>

**REMINDER: Sending a text message to 911 should be used only when placing a voice call to 911 is not an option. There is no guarantee that a text message will be sent or received in a timely manner – if at all.**