



CIEP ALERT

A Publication by the
COALITION ON INCLUSIVE EMERGENCY PLANNING
of the Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC)



9-1-1: OUR LIFELINE

On December 27, 2018, Washington State Emergency Management Division (EMD) issued an alert, announcing a widespread 911 outage that impacted most of the state. This alert was the first time that the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) was used on a statewide level.

Other alerts continued to vibrate on my phone. They came as emails and text messages by community notification systems used by emergency management agencies in the City of Seattle, King County, Pierce County, and Thurston County, places where I had subscribed to receive alerts. These alerts provided alternative 10-digit telephone numbers to reach my local emergency responders depending on the location of the emergency. Most counties provided one local telephone number while King County provided a list of phone numbers for ten public safety answering points or 911 call centers. Fortunately, full service was restored in less than 24 hours.

Subsequent news reports revealed that the multi-state outage originated with CenturyLink who provides telecommunication network services that included 911 call routing, ATM networks, and state lottery drawings. For those who have lived in Washington State for some time may recall a similar outage attributed to CenturyLink in April 2014 that led to a \$16M FCC fine. Similar breakdowns have occurred in networks owned by other vendors.

CIEP believes that the 911 outage had an immediate adverse impact on people with disabilities in Washington State who depend on this lifeline. Upon receiving a list of ten-digit telephone numbers for call centers in their area from local emergency management, people had to hunt for the local emergency number specific to their location. It is much easier to memorize a 3-digit number than a standard phone number, especially for children and others with mobility and cognitive disabilities who need to call for help.



Emergency alert

Widespread 911 outage in WA.
In case of emergency, call local police or fire department.
Type: Extreme Alert

[VIEW](#)

Screenshot of 911 Outage Alert from Washington Emergency Management Division

When relay services receive a 911 call request from someone with a hearing or speech disability, the relay operator needs to verify the caller's location. If the caller is not at the address listed in their relay profile, the operator checks a national database for the corresponding ten-digit number at the most appropriate 911 call center based on the location of the emergency given by the caller. When calling the relay, a 911 call automatically moves to the top of the queue so it is answered by the next available interpreter. If a ten-digit number is used, it is treated like a regular number and answered in turn. CIEP suggests that people using the relay to dial 911 and inform the interpreter about the ten-digit number when calling from a different location than their home or office.

The good news is that Text-to-9-1-1 remained functional throughout the outage so if technical problems prevent you from making a voice call to 911, texting is usually successful (where available). 12 out of 39 counties, totaling 160 call centers, in Washington offer the service. When someone attempts to text to 911 in areas where it is not available, an automatic error message is sent back stating that Text to 911 is not available, and to call 911 a different way.

One thing to remember here are possible delays in sending and receiving messages. 9-1-1 call centers process text messages the same way as voice calls, however the 9-1-1 call taker will be unable to hear background noises while on text. Texts to 9-1-1 does not work any faster than texts to another mobile phone. Text-to-9-1-1 is also useful for those who find themselves in dangerous situations such as domestic violence, home invasions, or active shooter, where it is unsafe to make a voice calls, or have a medical condition that interferes with speaking.

According to the National Emergency Numbering Association (NENA), an estimated 240 million calls were made to 9-1-1 each year. 80 percent of those calls were made from wireless devices. Unlike landline phones, wireless devices are not associated with a precise fixed address. While cellular towers closest to the 911 caller may provide a general idea of the caller's location, that information is not specific enough for rescue personnel to deliver assistance to the caller quickly. If an emergency occurs near a jurisdictional border, some texts may be inadvertently sent to a call center in a neighboring jurisdiction, or nowhere if text service is unavailable there.

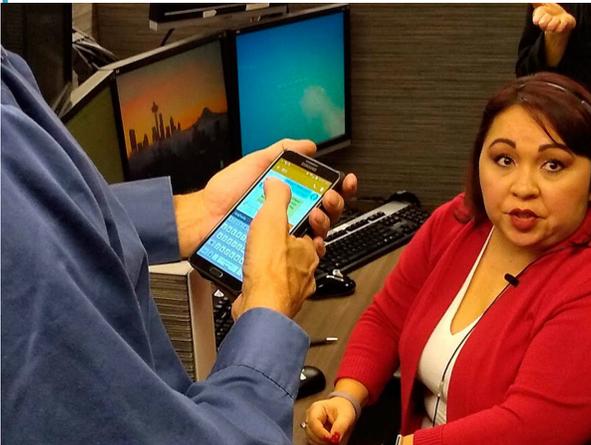
Despite these limitations, texting is a welcome new option because legacy telephone networks that support analog TTYs are becoming obsolete as TTY users migrate to newer internet based calling methods such as texting, captioned telephones, and videophones. It is anticipated that the 9-1-1 services will evolve with improvements



on the caller experience and more precise location identification as the system transitions to the Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG911) services in the next few years.

Since 9-1-1 services was launched 50 years ago, people with hearing and speech disabilities have struggled with equal access and speedy response times. They had to depend on a hearing/speaking person to make the call for them, even in the middle of the night. When Automatic Location Identification became available in the 1970's, they were taught to dial 9-1-1, then leave the phone off the hook, hoping and praying that help will arrive in time.

When the ADA was passed in 1990, state and local governments were required to allow direct access to 9-1-1 services for people using the TTY. In 1994, Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc. (TDI) was awarded a grant from the US Department of Justice to provide training for call takers in public safety answering points (PSAPs) on how



Jim House and Michelle Torresdiaz demonstrate King County's new Text to 911 service. Photo by Seattle Weekly 12/21/18

to recognize and handle calls from TTY users. Call takers nationwide learned how to respond to silent calls, decipher sentences that were typed with non-standard English grammar and syntax, replying in basic English, and how to use a TTY.

Although the technology has changed, being able to understand callers who use English as a second language remains a challenge whether the request for help comes in as a TTY call or a text message.

CIEP salutes all the call takers and dispatchers for their efforts in making our lifeline work, sending emergency assistance to anyone who needs it.

CIEP is a statewide advisory group that brings expertise and perspectives into disaster planning based on access and functional needs (AFN) faced by people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations in these areas: 1. Effective communications, 2. Programmatic Access, and 3. Physical Access. We welcome your suggestions for future issues.

Contact CIEP:

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News:

Icy Sidewalks Make Seattle Dangerous for People with Disabilities (Crosscut.com)

https://crosscut.com/2019/02/icy-sidewalks-make-seattle-dangerous-people-disabilities?utm_source=crosscut-facebook&utm_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR3oLZCAOgvpGMVW0DyNEdGUJzRDSdtr8LZ6YFAyrrO1iR0lwxDabpkjYo

Shelter Needs at Heart of New Full Scale Exercise (WA Emergency Management Division)

https://mil.wa.gov/blog/news/post/shelter-needs-at-heart-of-new-full-scale-exercise?fbclid=IwAR2kWjW108Vn57zyVzwtHWho3f7MZIciuOym7dacnOX7ATx_xLjGse43G4#.XFtip4EUzHo.facebook

King County Launches Text to 911 Service (Seattle Weekly)

https://www.seattleweekly.com/news/king-county-launches-text-to-911-service/?fbclid=IwAR0lqaLrsACJjJG60TDs40eNdojEKaBVC-umZE1-Wc-o_pgDlZZrUuGggYc

Resources:

Take Winter by the Storm—Preparedness Tips and Checklists

https://takewinterbystorm.org/checklists_links/?fbclid=IwAR1ZutIYFQdFeUmjEiS50Wdf87dwukAWKVnDuzTafmrwbmHHpGs2I7GJ-z4



NENA Releases Three ASL/Captioned Videos About Text-to-9-1-1

<https://www.nena.org/news/433366/NENA-Releases-Three-ASLCaptioned-Videos-About-Text-to-9-1-1-.htm>

Coming Events:

CIEP Quarterly Meetings Note: All meetings begin at 10:00am and end at 11:30am.

WHEN: Scheduled meetings: 3/20/2019 and 6/19/2019

WHERE: DVR Headquarters, 4565 7th Ave. SE Lacey, WA 98503 (Conference Room)

Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC) Quarterly Meetings

Two-day meeting: Day #1: 9:00am - 4:00pm Day #2: 9:00am - 2:00pm

WHEN: 4/11-12/2019 7/11-12/2019 10/3-4/2019

WHERE: Bellingham Vancouver Wenatchee

On Day #1 of each WASILC quarterly meetings, a panel discussion and public forum is held from 1:30 to 4:00 pm to gather information and advice from the local disability community, consumers, service providers, and the public to identify what is working in their area, as well as identify gaps and barriers. Call Nichole at 360.725.3693 for more information.

All CIEP and WASILC Quarterly Meetings are open to everyone, per the Open Public Meetings Act (RCW 42.30). ASL interpreters are provided. For all other reasonable accommodation requests, please contact Jim House at HouseJ@dshs.wa.gov at least two weeks prior to the meeting.