

THINGS CONSUMERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT 9-1-1 PRODUCTS

From the State 9-1-1 Committee in Michigan

March 2011

Thinking about purchasing a communications service to help you in the event of emergency? Considering downloading an application that adds “extras” to 9-1-1 on your Smart phone? Are you looking into buying a phone or communications product that will assist you to locate a lost or missing disabled or elderly person through the 9-1-1 system? Have you purchased a 9-1-1 application? Before you do, here’s some information that should help inform you about the myriad of products and services that are being marketed to the public as well as some of limits on the current 9-1-1 system.

Non-service initialized phones:

Under an order issued by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC), 9-1-1 calls made from cellular phones must be routed to a 9-1-1 center (commonly known as a public safety answering point or PSAP), **whether they have active service from a provider or not.**

- These phones are known as NSI phones and 9-1-1 calls on NSI phones usually route to a PSAP, but **in most cases, they DO NOT provide the caller’s call-back number or the caller’s location.**
- Some services, such as alerting services (like one-touch calling services for senior citizens) may use NSI phones to call 9-1-1 on a wireless/cellular device. If this is the case, in most circumstances, no call-back number or location information will accompany the call.
- Many donated wireless phones that are given away in charitable programs are NSI phones.

Texting 9-1-1:

Texting, also known as SMS (or short message service) has become a common means for people to communicate.

- While texting is often quick, convenient, and in some cases, even easier than making a phone call, the **technology to text 9-1-1 has not yet evolved!** At this time, text 9-1-1 messages cannot be moved into the 9-1-1 routing system, nor can location information be provided via text, or can a 9-1-1 phone line send an outgoing text message.
- Until a broad 9-1-1 network upgrade has been done and a system for the provider to send 9-1-1 text messages has been established, use your regular voice-based system or TTY to activate an emergency call.
- If you are hard of hearing or deaf and do not have access to a TTY, a 9-1-1 call on a voice-based line may be your best option, even if you are unable to speak.

*** PLEASE REMEMBER ***

*** DIAL 9-1-1 IN MICHIGAN IF YOU HAVE AN EMERGENCY! ***

Dialing 0:

Before the widespread use of 9-1-1, dialing “0” for a telephone operator was commonly used as a means to report an emergency. While 9-1-1 has replaced this system, it is still sometimes used by some people in an emergency.

- Be aware! Responses and capabilities of the “0” for operator vary from provider to provider (and even from state to state).
- Your location may not be displayed to the operator.
- Your call may be answered by a communications provider’s operator outside of your state who is not familiar with your emergency response system and may not be trained to answer emergency calls to the level that an emergency dispatcher/telecommunicator is.

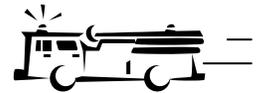
Disconnected Phones:

In some areas, disconnected landline phones will still be able to dial 9-1-1, in other areas they cannot. This varies from provider to provider and if it is a potential issue in your household, it is advisable to check with your telephone provider in advance.

Are you thinking of switching providers, phone service, or technology?

There is now a myriad of products on the markets, many of them offering lower costs and more options for service (such as multiple lines, voice mail, and data service).

- It is important to research **any** product or service that you are thinking of buying, since they are regulated at different levels, and in some emerging technologies, they may have not have any regulatory oversight at all.
- Some do not work if you do not have electricity.



*** PLEASE REMEMBER ***

*** DIAL 9-1-1 IN MICHIGAN IF YOU HAVE AN EMERGENCY! ***

Subscription based services:

When searching for a simple, easy way to use a product to activate an emergency response for you in the event you can't reach the phone, such a device that can be worn as a pendant or clipped to a belt, make sure you ask the provider/seller, "What does it do?" If a product is being sold and promises to reach a 9-1-1 center, ask the following questions:

- A. Does the product provide location information of the caller to the PSAP?
- B. Does the product provide a call-back number to the PSAP?
- C. If your answer is no to A or B above, ask the provider selling you're the service is the emergency call routed to a private/corporate call center that can contact a PSAP for you with your location information and information about the emergency?

Downloaded Applications:

With the inception of SmartPhones, iPhones, Droids, and the ever-growing options of data-based services that you can have literally at your fingertips, the axiom, "there's an app for that" can also extend to different services using the term 9-1-1. If you want to download an app, make sure you educate yourself about what you are getting. Here are some questions which you should ask:

1. Where does this service work and is the information from the application available everywhere? Not all jurisdictions across the country participate in notification systems or have the ability to update events in "real time."
2. If you download an application, ask yourself, "How is this application going to help in an emergency?"
 - For instance, how is an application that contacts third parties for you when you call on going to affect you and them when you make an emergency call?
 - Do you have the personal resources to keep that information current?
 - Are others aware that you have made them part of your 9-1-1 service?

Remember, the technology market for consumers is constantly evolving and new products and services are emerging all the time, if you have a question or if the product sounds to "too good to be true" contact your local 9-1-1 director not by calling 9-1-1, but by calling the administrative number listed for your local 9-1-1 center at: www.michigan.gov/documents/msp/PSAP_2011_327250_7.pdf. If you'd like to learn more about 9-1-1 in Michigan, visit the State 9-1-1 Committee's Web site at: www.michigan.gov/snc.