



## Virginia Beach Text to 9-1-1 Frequently Asked Questions

### What is Text to 9-1-1 and how does it work?

It is the ability to send standard "short message" (SMS) text communications to 9-1-1. If you have a wireless phone with the ability to send SMS text messages, you can text 9-1-1. Check with your carrier to verify that your phone and plan will allow you to do this. To use the service, simply send a text message to "911" from within the City of Virginia Beach. You will receive a response from a 9-1-1 professional asking for the location of your emergency. If the service is unavailable for any reason, you will receive a response that instructs you to place a voice call to 9-1-1.

### Who is Text to 9-1-1 for and when should I use it?

Texting during an emergency could be helpful if you are deaf, hard of hearing, 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, please call. Texting to 9-1-1 should only be considered an option in those unique situations, rather than as a convenient alternative to placing a voice call. In the event of an emergency situation, VB 9-1-1 wants you to *call if you can, and text if you can't*.

### Which carriers are supported?

Each of the four nationwide wireless carriers: Verizon Wireless, AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile. Check with your carrier if you do not see them listed. Many regional carriers share network infrastructure with the nationwide services and may be in the process of activating the service on their systems. On August 8, 2014, the FCC mandated that all wireless carriers were required to provide text to 9-1-1 service by the end of 2014.

### Are emergency texts handled differently than regular texts?

Text messages to 9-1-1 do not have special priority, so your texts may be delayed depending on the strength of the network in your area and overall text volume being handled on your provider's network.

“Over The Top” message services that use the data connection on your phone rather than traditional SMS - like WhatsApp, iMessage and BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) - will not be able to send a message to 9-1-1. Check with your carrier for more information on ensuring you are able to send a text to 9-1-1 if necessary.

Normal text messaging rates may apply on text messages sent to 9-1-1. Check with your carrier for more information.

### **Can I send photos or videos?**

No. Virginia Beach, like many 9-1-1 centers around the country, is exploring the technology but photos and video to 9-1-1 are not supported at this time.

### **Is my location information sent on texts to 9-1-1?**

Unlike a voice call to 9-1-1 made from your wireless phone, text messages do not automatically activate location services on your phone. Generally speaking, 9-1-1 will be able to see limited location data when you text 9-1-1, but it is critical that you provide a location for emergency response.

Sources:

Virginia Beach Emergency Communications & Citizen Services

TCS GEM 9-1-1

<http://www.cnet.com/news/text-to-911-what-you-need-to-know-faq/>

<http://www.fcc.gov/guides/text-911-quick-facts-faqsVir>