



NEWS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
COURT HOUSE, NORRISTOWN, PA., BOX 311, 19404-0311

Frank X. Custer, Communications Director

Jessica Willingham, Communications Assistant

PHONE (610) 278-3061 FAX (610) 278-5943

COMMISSIONERS: JOSH SHAPIRO, *Chair*

VALERIE A. ARKOOSH, MD, MPH, *Vice Chair*

BRUCE L. CASTOR, JR., *Commissioner*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 20, 2015

Montco Launches “Text to 911” Service

Eagleville, PA (July 20, 2015) – The Montgomery County Commissioners and the county’s Department of Public Safety today launched a new “text to 9-1-1” service that now gives county residents the ability to send short text messages to 9-1-1 in an emergency if their wireless phone service is provided by one of the four largest carriers: AT&T, Sprint, Verizon Wireless, or T-Mobile.

Text to 9-1-1 is designed to be used primarily in an emergency situation when someone is unable to speak because the caller is deaf, hard-of-hearing, or speech impaired, or when speaking out loud would put the caller in danger.

To underline the important, but limited use of text to 9-1-1, the commissioners were joined at a demonstration of the new service at the county’s Emergency Operations Center, which houses the 9-1-1 dispatch operations, by representatives of organizations for the deaf and victims of domestic abuse.

“The safety of our residents is the most important responsibility we have,” said Josh Shapiro, chair of the county commissioners. “We are pleased to offer this latest advancement in 9-1-1 technology and we are committed to providing additional improvements as they become available.”

Commissioner Val Arkoosh emphasized that “while text to 9-1-1 is an important tool for certain segments of the population, it certainly is not as efficient as a voice 9-1-1 call. The phrase ‘call when you can, text when you must,’ is a good guide.”

“When making a text to 9-1-1 communication, it is very important to be succinct with your messages while including important, pertinent information for the dispatcher,” said Commissioner Bruce L. Castor, Jr.

Mary Onama, executive director of Victim Services Center of Montgomery County, and Maria Macaluso, executive director of the Women's Center of Montgomery County, whose organizations serve victims of domestic abuse, both praised the county for implementing the new service and said it would be a valuable tool in helping to protect victims of abuse.

While text to 9-1-1 is an important tool to enhance communications with the public in an emergency, it has limitations. The public is urged to keep these points in mind.

- Only use text to 9-1-1 in an emergency and when you are unable to make a voice call.
 - 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.
- Don't Abuse text to 9-1-1. It is **only** for emergencies.
 - It is a crime to text or call 9-1-1 with a false report.
- The text to 9-1-1 service has limitations.
 - 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 has a delay.
 - A text-to 9-1-1 call that hits a cellular tower outside Montgomery County will either go to that other county's 9-1-1 center or, if text-to-9-1-1 is not available there, the caller will receive a bounce-back message saying the service is not available and to contact 9-1-1 by other means.

For more information on text to 9-1-1, go to this link: <http://montcopa.org/Text-to-911>.