

## **Vermont Enhanced 911 Board Launches Statewide Text to 911 Trial for Emergency Help**

### **Six-Month Trial Period for Verizon Wireless Customers Only**

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Montpelier, Vt. – Beginning today, Verizon Wireless customers can send a text message to 911 from locations in Vermont for emergency help as part of a six-month trial to test the potential of this technology.

From now until October 15, 2012, the Williston Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) will accept 911 text messages from Verizon Wireless customers as part of a collaboration among the Vermont Enhanced 911 Board, Verizon Wireless and Intrado. Intrado, a Colorado based emergency communications technology provider, installed next-generation 911 software that enables text messaging in the Williston PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point).

Although there have been trials in other parts of the country, this will be the first statewide trial in Vermont to enable “text-to-911” technology using 911 digits and live call takers. The trial is being provided at no cost to the State of Vermont.

All text messages to 911 originating from a Verizon Wireless device in Vermont will be routed to the Williston PSAP, which will coordinate with the appropriate local first responders to respond to the emergency. In order to do this, texters should include the location of the emergency in the first message.

According to David Tucker, Executive Director of the Enhanced 911 Board, this trial is intended to examine use of text-to-911 for two types of emergency situations: one experienced by someone who is deaf or hard-of-hearing, or one where the caller might be in additional danger if someone overhears them making a voice call to 911.

“Vermont has one of the most advanced 911 systems in the country, and by undertaking this trial, we are giving deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals a way to directly contact 911 without the use of a TTY attachment to their mobile phone. Others who may be victims of domestic violence or in some other dangerous situation and might not be able to safely make a voice call to 911 could also use this technology. This trial, which is scheduled to go through mid-October, is intended to explore the value of text-to-911 in these situations,” said Tucker.

Tucker explained that there are several parameters that users should be aware of before sending an emergency text message to 911. “We need to test and evaluate all aspects of “text-to-911” technology before any potential widespread implementation,” Tucker said. “We understand there is strong interest in this new technology, but we need to better understand how the current technology works and help our own operations, as well as helping Verizon Wireless and Intrado to learn from our experience before possibly rolling out this technology permanently.”

“Verizon has been at the forefront of 911 public safety innovation. We are working with the State of Vermont to evaluate the possibilities of this 911 texting system with an emphasis on its use for reliable and secure emergency communications for Verizon Wireless customers,” Christine Berberich, president, New England for Verizon Wireless said. “We’ll take the

knowledge obtained from the trial to better understand the challenges of ‘text-to-911’ technology on a statewide basis.”

“We applaud the state’s vision in launching this trial”, said Dami Hummel, vice president and general manager of Intrado’s Mobility division. “There are more than 36 million deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in this country, and a statewide deployment such as this not only benefits the citizens of Vermont, but it goes a long way toward proving how valuable this capability is on a nationwide basis.”

Verizon Wireless customers in Vermont should keep the following in mind if they send a text-to-911 during the trial period:

- Customers should use the texting option only when a voice call to 911 is not an option.
- Sending a text to 9-1-1 may take longer than a voice call because someone must enter the text, send it through the system and then the 911 call taker has to enter a text response and send it back. Time is critical in a life-threatening emergency, and customers should be aware of this difference.
- Providing location information and the nature of the emergency in the first message is imperative. The Williston PSAP will not be able to access the cell phone location or speak with the person who is sending the text, and will need to convey the texter’s location to local first responders.
- Text abbreviations and slang should never be used so that the intent of the dialog can be as clear as possible.
- Customers must be in range of cell towers in Vermont. If customers are outside or near the edge of the state, the message may not reach the Williston PSAP.
- Texts to 911 have the same 160 character limit as other text messages.
- Verizon Wireless customers must have mobile phones that are capable of sending text messages. Text messages to 911 will count either against their messaging bundle or be charged at 20 cents per message.
- The texting function should only be used for emergency situations that require an immediate response from police, fire or emergency medical services.