Text to 9-1-1 Frequently Asked Questions

On August 26, 2020, University Police Department (UPD) announced a new service being implemented on campus. “Text to 9-1-1,” is a service to report emergencies by faculty, staff, students, and community members who may be deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech disability, or who cannot safely call 9-1-1 in a dangerous situation.

“Call if you can, text if you can’t”

Dialing 9-1-1 in an emergency is still the preferred way to request help, and everyone is reminded to “Call if you can, text if you can’t.” For most people, sending a text to 9-1-1 will not replace making a call.

Q: What is Text to 9-1-1 technology?

A: Text to 9-1-1 is the ability to send a text message to 9-1-1 from your mobile phone or handheld device.

Q: Can I Text to 9-1-1 everywhere?

A:
- No, Text to 9-1-1 is not currently available everywhere.
- Text to 9-1-1 is available in a majority of areas in Sonoma County, but may not be available when roaming. Currently, the following agencies in Sonoma County are utilizing this service: California Highway Patrol Golden Gate Division, Cotati Police Department, Petaluma Police Department, Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety, Santa Rosa Police Department, Sonoma County Sheriff’s Office. Other agencies may follow suit.
- To use Text to 9-1-1, you must be subscribed to your wireless carrier’s text or data plan to send or receive text messages.
- If Text to 9-1-1 is not available in your area, or is temporarily unavailable, you should receive a message indicating that Text to 9-1-1 is not available and to contact 9-1-1 by other means.

Q: When should I text 9-1-1?

A: Text to 9-1-1 is intended primarily for use in three emergency scenarios:
  1. For an individual who is deaf, hard-of-hearing or has a speech disability.
  2. For someone who is in a situation where it is not safe to place a voice call to 9-1-1.
  3. A medical emergency that renders the person incapable of speech.
ONLY text 9-1-1 in an emergency. Prank-texters can be identified and prosecuted according to local laws/regulations.
Calling 9-1-1 in an emergency is still the preferred way to request help.

Q: What are the limitations with text-to-9-1-1 service?
A:
- Text to 9-1-1 may take longer to receive and respond to than a voice call, texts do not provide the location of the texter and texts can be received out of order, or may not be received at all.
- Text GPS location information is not as accurate as wireless location technology.
- Voice calls are real-time communication and Text to 9-1-1 is not.
- If you include anyone else on your Text to 9-1-1, it may not be received by 9-1-1.
- Texts must be sent in English. At this time translation services for Text to 9-1-1 are not available.

Q: How do I text to 9-1-1?
A:
- Enter the numbers “911” in the “To” or “Recipient” field.
- The first text to 9-1-1 should be brief and include the location of the emergency, and identify if the need is for police, fire or ambulance.
- Push the “Send” button.
- Answer questions and follow instructions from the 9-1-1 call taker.
- Text in simple words – no abbreviations or slang. No emojis.
- Do not send pictures or videos. These cannot be received by Text to 9-1-1 at this time.
- Keep additional text messages brief.

Q: How will I know if 9-1-1 received my text?
A: A 9-1-1 call center should respond to the text. If Text to 9-1-1 is not available, you should receive a message from the wireless carrier stating that Text to 9-1-1 is not available and that you must place a voice or relay call to 9-1-1.

Q: Is there a charge to text-to-9-1-1?
A: Standard text messaging rates apply.

Q: Can I text to 9-1-1 in languages other than English?
A: Text to 9-1-1 is currently only available in English.
UPD offers many services including livescan fingerprinting, motorist assistance, safety escorts, and other community services. For more information on our services, please visit our Service Programs webpage.