

Text to 911

In March of 2015, the McKean County Commissioners and 911 Director Andrew Johnson announced that wireless customers in McKean County had the ability to utilize Text to 911 for emergencies. The service allows access for the hearing and speech impaired, as well as a safe means of contact to 911 for those who are in a situation where it is unsafe to speak on the phone.

You can learn more about this service and what it means for McKean County residents by reading our Frequently Asked Questions below, or by contacting 911 Director Andrew Johnson by phone (814)-887-5070 ext 10, or [e-mail](mailto:amjohnson@mckeancountypa.org) at amjohnson@mckeancountypa.org

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I send a text to 9-1-1?

Texting to 9-1-1 is not available in many areas, but McKean County has been proactive in ensuring that we have the appropriate technology available and will continue to work with carriers to make this service available to its customers. Wireless customers can send a short message service (SMS) text message for emergency help when unable to make a 9-1-1 call.

Where can I use Text to 9-1-1?

Text to 9-1-1 is available to any wireless customer within range of an McKean County cell tower.

Why isn't Text to 9-1-1 available everywhere?

This is a new technology that may require upgrades to some 9-1-1 centers and coordination with wireless phone companies. While McKean County has the appropriate technology in place, not all carriers are ready to offer the capability in all areas.

Can I use Text to 9-1-1 outside of McKean County?

In short, no. While many other counties are also working to make this technology available, it is not available everywhere or while you are "roaming". If you Text to 9-1-1 outside of the County, you will receive a "bounce back" message telling you that the service is not available in your area.

When will Text to 9-1-1 be available for my carrier?

The four national carriers voluntarily committed to provide Text to 9-1-1 service by May 15, 2014 in all areas served by their networks where a 9-1-1 call center is prepared to receive texts. Other carriers have been encouraged to develop similar commitments and the County will announce that service as it becomes available.

What will happen if I text 9-1-1 and my carrier doesn't provide that service?

The FCC has required all wireless telephone companies to send an automatic message to any consumer who tries to send a text message to 9-1-1 where the service is not yet available. Consumers will be advised to contact emergency services by another means.

What is Text to 9-1-1?

Text to 9-1-1 is the ability to send a short message/text message to 9-1-1. Texting during an emergency could be helpful if you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, or if a voice call to 9-1-1 might otherwise be dangerous or impossible.

How do I text 9-1-1 in an emergency?

Enter the numbers "911" in the "To" field. The first text message should be brief and contain the location of the emergency, including municipality, and the type of help needed. Push the "send" button. Be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 9-1-1 call taker. Text in simple words. Do not use abbreviations. Keep text messages brief and concise.

When should I use text to 9-1-1?

Customers should use the texting option only when calling 9-1-1 is not an option. Using a phone to call 9-1-1 is still the most efficient way to reach emergency help. Texting is not always instantaneous, which is critical during a life-threatening emergency. It will probably take slightly longer to dispatch emergency services in a text to 9-1-1 situation in McKean County because of the time involved.

If I am able to Text to 9-1-1, will the 9-1-1 Center automatically know my location?

Texting to 9-1-1 is different from making a voice call. If making a voice call, the Center will receive your phone number and approximate location automatically. In cases where you text 9-1-1, the Center will not receive this information.

What should I include in my text?

Providing location information and nature of the emergency in the first text message is imperative, since the McKean County 911 Center will receive only an approximate location of the cell phone, and will not be able to speak with the person sending the text. Text abbreviations or slang should never be used so that the intent of the dialogue can be as clear as possible.

How much information can I put in the text?

Texts sent to 9-1-1 have the same 160-character limit as other text messages. SMS911 should only be used to communicate between emergency help and the texter with no pictures, video, other attachments or other recipients appended to the message.

What if I have a non-emergency, can I use Text to 9-1-1?

The texting function should only be used for emergency situations that require an immediate response from police, fire, or emergency medical services. Non-emergency issues should still be communicated to the McKean County 911 Center through its non-emergency line at 814-887-4911.

A few quick facts to know if you need to text 9-1-1:

- Text location information is not equal to current location technology
- As with all text messages, 9-1-1 messages can take longer to receive, can be received out of order, or may not be received at all
- Text to 9-1-1 is not available if you are roaming
- A text or data plan is required to place a text to 9-1-1
- If texting to 9-1-1 is not available in your area or is temporarily unavailable, you will receive a message indicating that texting 9-1-1 is not available to contact 9-1-1 by other means
- Photos and videos cannot be sent to 9-1-1 at this time
- Text to 9-1-1 cannot include more than one person – do not send your emergency text to anyone other than 9-1-1
- Do NOT text and drive!