

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE _____

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SUFFOLK POLICE ADVISE TEXT-TO-911 NOW AVAILABLE

SUFFOLK, VA (October 22, 2020) The Suffolk Police Department is pleased to announce that Text-to-911 is now available to allow those in need of emergency services to use their cellular device to contact 911 when they are unable to place a voice call to 911.

Text-to-911 is **NOT** a method of convenience, and a voice call is still the preferred and most efficient method for contacting 911. This option is intended for the following circumstances:

- Deaf, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired community
- Medical emergency that renders callers unable to speak
- Those situations when speaking aloud would potentially escalate the situation or put the caller in danger (such as domestic violence, home invasion, abduction, etc.)

To contact emergency services by text message, simply enter 911 without spaces or hyphens in the "To" field of your mobile device and type your message into the message field, and then push the "send" button. It is the same process that is used

for sending a regular text message from your mobile device. When texting 911 for an emergency, the first message should be the address or location of the emergency and the type of emergency help needed (Police, Fire, emergency medical aid). Keep text messages brief and concise, using full words. Don't text 911 in a group chat or send photos, videos, attachments, GIFs, or emojis. Don't text and drive. Stay with your phone, and be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 911 call taker. If you are trying not to be overheard requesting help, remember to silence your phone.

“Having the ability to contact 911 by text is a significant advancement to our already robust 911 system. By giving those that require emergency services this option, we are greatly expanding the ability of first responders to provide critical assistance to those in need.”, said Major Cassandra Garvin.

Text-to-911 is free, works through short message service (SMS) with cellular carriers, and requires a text or data plan. There may be instances where a voice call cannot connect due to poor cellular signal or other phone service interruption, but a text message can still go through. A text sent to 911 in an area without text-to-911 service should receive an automatic reply stating the service is not available.

Another welcome feature is the ability to translate a text message in Spanish. Dispatchers have access to translation services that they utilize in order to conference a voice caller in with, but they have the ability to translate a Spanish text message instantaneously. When they respond to a text in English, it will translate their message into Spanish for the individual to read.

A voice call is still the preferred and most efficient method for contacting 911. Simply stated, **call if you can, text if you can't.**

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