



News Release



Creating Solutions for Our Future

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9-1-1 Emergency Dispatch Services Improved for Thurston County

OLYMPIA – The stage has been set for improved communications between citizens needing help and the emergency services they require. The improvements will come under a “next generation” 9-1-1 dispatch system being pioneered in Thurston County.

According to Thurston County Department of Communications (CAPCOM) Director Jim Quackenbush, new network and data base improvements are bringing faster processing times from dialing to connection with the correct 9-1-1 center. It is the first phase of a statewide 9-1-1 modernization that will eventually move the system from voice only communications under the current analog mode to digital mode. Within a few years, it will allow both voice and data over the network that isn't possible with the previous 1960's era technology.

Maj. Gen. Timothy Lowenberg, director of the Washington Military Department, congratulated CAPCOM on being the first 9-1-1 center in Washington to complete the first of three phases toward the new Next Generation 9-1-1 system. “This network moves the state of Washington forward in providing the most advanced 9-1-1 capabilities in the nation aimed at serving the current and future needs of the residents. I am pleased that the 9-1-1 center that serves the capital of our state will be the first to demonstrate our commitment to providing the best in 9-1-1 services.”

Eventually, this multi-year modernization project will allow 9-1-1 centers to receive text messages, not only from general populations but from 650,000 Washington State individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing and have a speech disability. The improvements will give these individuals the ability to contact 9-1-1 directly. Currently, while the number of TTY (teletypewriter) calls is declining, these individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing and have a speech disability must use TTY from either home or work. For those who don't have TTY, they must call a third-party (called a relay service), which may have to find out the location from the caller prior to connecting to appropriate 9-1-1 center. Once connected to the center, the caller's emergency information then may have to be repeated.

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Once finalized, this improved system will also give 9-1-1 centers the ability to receive photos, vehicle crash notifications including data on the likely injuries to passengers from services like On-Star, Sync and others. That information can then be provided to responders enhancing public safety for all citizens.

CAPCOM Director Quackenbush says the system improvements will allow more integration with changing personal technologies. "9-1-1 is the foundation for our public safety system to provide assistance for citizens during emergencies. This upgrade is the first step to enable the system to accommodate current technologies, and be able to adapt to technological advancements that are emerging almost monthly. We are still approximately 2 to 3 years away from being able to accept text messages to 9-1-1, and this funding will go toward eventual provision of that service."

To enable the improvements, Qwest is deploying a converged next generation voice and data network to connect the 9-1-1 centers with each other and the communities they serve. "We're thrilled to work with our public safety partners to overhaul and improve the 9-1-1 emergency response system for the state of Washington," said Kirk Nelson, Qwest President for Washington.

Funding for the eight next generation 9-1-1 test counties (including Thurston) and for bringing the other 31 counties to this same level, is being provided under the current 9-1-1 excise tax. The final modernization phase, which will require upgrades and replacements of some equipment in each county to fully accept digital voice and data, will be funded from additional revenue to be produced from 9-1-1 legislation that was approved in the 2010 legislative session. This legislation, which was signed into law this month by Gov. Chris Gregoire, would:

- Extend the excise tax to Voice over Internet Phones (VoIP) that aren't currently required to collect the 9-1-1 tax, to help support the system costs;
- Raise the state 9-1-1 tax from \$.20 to \$.25 per month, and the local tax from \$.50 to \$.70 per month.