



THE COUNTY OF CHESTER



COMMISSIONERS
Terence Farrell
Kathi Cozzone
Michelle Kichline

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS
313 W. Market Street, Suite 6202
P.O. Box 2748
West Chester, PA 19380-0991
(610) 344-6100

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EDITORS: The following is for immediate release. If you have any questions, please contact Rebecca Brain, Communications Coordinator at (610) 344-6279 or Mark Rupsis, Chester County Chief Operating Officer, at (610) 344-6026.

Chester County launches Text to 9-1-1 service *New service available when calling 9-1-1 is not possible*

WEST CHESTER _The Chester County Commissioners and officials from the Department of Emergency Services announced today the availability of a Text to 9-1-1 service for situations when calling 9-1-1 in an emergency is not possible. Chester County is the first county in Southeastern Pennsylvania to introduce Text to 9-1-1 capabilities.

“By adding a Text to 9-1-1 option, we’re providing equal access to emergency services for residents with hearing and speech disabilities,” said Chester County Commissioners’ Chair Terence Farrell. “However, our clear message for this new service is ‘call if you can, text if you must’.”

“The growth of text messaging as a form of communication is immense, and it is invaluable within the hearing and speech disabilities community,” added Commissioner Kathi Cozzone. “As importantly, this new service could be a safe option for those who need to contact 9-1-1 in a domestic violence or crime-related emergency situation.”

According to Chester County Department of Emergency Services Director Robert Kagel, the county’s 9-1-1 operators currently receive around 775 calls every day, and two out of three of those calls come from wireless (cell) phones.

“Our Department of Emergency Services and the greater 9-1-1 community strives to meet the evolving needs of the public, and right now that means implementing a Text to 9-1-1 service,” notes Commissioner Michelle Kichline. “This is part of a larger nationwide initiative known as Next Generation 9-1-1, aimed at maximizing emergency services in a growing wireless mobile society – an initiative that Chester County is committed to investing in further.”

In December 2012, an agreement was reached nationally among the four wireless carriers – AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon – to provide a nationwide SMS Text to 9-1-1 solution. Chester County researched options for implementation and signed an agreement with TeleCommunications Systems (TCS) in February, at no cost to add the Text to 9-1-1 capability. Three of the four major carriers – Verizon, Sprint and AT&T – are fully deployed. Testing with T-Mobile is scheduled to be completed by Monday, April 13, 2015.

Peggy Gusz, Executive Director of The Crime Victims' Center of Chester County, Inc. commented on the value of the new Text to 9-1-1 service: "In a situation where voice communication is not an option, texting to 9-1-1 may help to prevent a crime from being committed and may even save a life. Chester County's investment in this service is very much appreciated, and adds another element of safety and protection for Chester County citizens, particularly those at risk."

Text to 9-1-1 calls do take longer to process than voice calls, and the location accuracy is not as precise as voice calls from a wireless phone.

If Text to 9-1-1 is the only option:

- You must have a data plan to text.
- Do not use abbreviations.
- Answer the questions as quickly and briefly as possible.
- If the situation changes, and you can make a voice call, let the telecommunicator know, then dial 9-1-1.

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Chester County is the first county in Pennsylvania to initiate a strategic planning process and has a Aaa rating on its bonds from Moody's Investors Service as well as AAA ratings from Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings. Established by William Penn as one of Pennsylvania's three original counties, Chester County has been named by Forbes.com and Movoto.com as one of America's best places to raise a family and is ranked one of the healthiest counties in Pennsylvania by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.