



5 Ways NG911 Can Improve Your Agency

The potential benefits of an NG911 system are significant – from safer officers to better service to your community.

1. Improved Officer Safety

With NG911, a 911 “call” will take very different forms: Staff at PSAPs will be able to receive, process and store text, pictures and videos from citizens. Even better, that information can be quickly — sometimes almost immediately — relayed to first responders, giving them more precise information. For example, access to live video from cameras inside a bank being robbed could give responding officers valuable information about suspects, weapons and the number of hostages.

NG911 also permits other digital information, such as maps, to be forwarded to officers, says Marcoux. “Most of the law officers [in Vermont] have mobile data terminals in their vehicles so we could push a map out to them instead of having the 911 operator relay this information verbally,” he explains. “When you’re working alone in a rural situation, the more information the officer has, the safer he will be.” Dispatchers could quickly send backup to help a wounded officer wherever he is in a sprawling rural area. Another benefit will be the ease in which dispatchers can share intelligence with officers, providing additional information on what could be a dangerous situation.

In the future, the effectiveness of the NG911 system’s ability to share data back and forth with officers in the field should increase as the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) establishes a wireless public safety broadband network.

2. Improved Efficiency

One big benefit of NG911: The new technology will allow PSAPs to identify the location of callers — especially those on wireless devices — faster and more accurately so law enforcement can find citizens quickly in an emergency. “Because NG911 provides more precise location information automatically, an officer won’t spend as much time looking for a car that went off the road and into a ditch,” says Mark Grady, founder of INdigital Telecom which provides NG911 technology to the state of Indiana.

Getting more evidence in the form of videos and photos will be very useful when it comes to solving cases or taking them to trial. “If someone snaps a picture of a license plate or a suspect, that’s obviously beneficial to law enforcement,” says Marlys R. Davis, E-911 program manager for King County in Seattle.

With this information, a deputy or officer would be able to identify and catch a suspect more easily. Adds police chief Reyes: “We would significantly increase the apprehension and case-closure rate with the amount of evidence coming into our center.” Transferring a 911 caller’s information between jurisdictions is far easier, too, when agencies are on the same Internet Protocol (IP) technology. Jackie Mines, director of emergency communication networks for the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, couldn’t do that with her previous network. “That alone is a huge benefit,” she says.

3. Improved Public Safety

In 2005, the year before NG911 came to Indiana, Grady says that a citizen who dialed 911 would wait 23 to 27 seconds for the call to be routed to a 911 operator; with NG911, that's now less than 3 seconds. "If you're waiting for someone to take a call during a domestic violence situation, things can go sideways on you pretty quick," he notes.

Texting for help is also potentially life-saving when citizens can't make a call or speak without endangering themselves. The major wireless carriers have agreed to support texting to 911 by 2014, however, NG911 texting applications will continue to improve upon the proposed services.

Similarly, an upgraded emergency response system will provide better public service in a natural disaster or other emergency. NG911 call centers will be able to instantly re-route a call to another tier of PSAPs if the first is not available. This was essential when Vermont was struck by Hurricane Irene. "Our second-busiest PSAP in Rutland had to be evacuated," says Jim Lipinski, former Enhanced 911 IT manager for Vermont, one of the first U.S. states with a statewide NG911 system. "In a traditional 911 system, calls would have queued up and people would have abandoned them." But during the storm and its aftermath, the system was able to distribute the load throughout Vermont – meaning every 911 call was answered swiftly.

4. Better Access for Special-Needs Communities

The deaf and hard-of-hearing, the mentally disabled, the physically disabled and senior citizens will especially benefit from an upgrade to the nation's 911 system, since it will be easier for them to reach 911 with their phones, without requiring additional devices. Judy Flores, director of the Black Hawk Consolidated Communications Center in Waterloo, Iowa, helped launch the country's first text-to-911 program in 2009. "The biggest benefit so far is allowing our citizens to have that extra access point, in particular our hard-of-hearing and speech-impaired community," she says. "They have the same access as anyone else [now]."

5. Potential Costs Savings

Upgrading to NG911 is not inexpensive, but over time, the agencies that upgrade will save money through efficiencies. Vermont was able to save significant funds by rerouting 911 calls from a PSAP that was taking less than 1 percent of the state's calls because the new IP technology can pick up calls from other parts of the state. As already noted, it's easier, faster and less expensive to share information between jurisdictions and agencies; many communities and regions will likely combine their resources to make the transition to NG911 possible.

Then there are the incalculable costs. Says Flores, "If you save one life because you made an improvement, how can you measure that?"