



Media Release

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Specialized 9-1-1 text service for Deaf and Speech-Impaired now available in Northern Interior

Regional Districts in the northern interior are now providing people who are Deaf/Deaf-Blind, Hard-of-Hearing or Speech Impaired (DHHSI) with the ability to contact 9-1-1 through a new specialized text service, called Text with 9-1-1 (T9-1-1). The service is available to residents living within the regional districts of Fraser-Fort George (RDFFG), Cariboo, Kitimat-Stikine and Bulkley-Nechako who pre-register with their wireless providers. The service is provided by E-Comm— the emergency communications centre responsible for answering 9-1-1 calls in the northern interior.

“Text With 911 brings our children and families the ability to communicate in the same way that anyone else can in emergency situations. It must be noted, that this service is also a game changer for first responders to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people – now our children and families can communicate the enhanced information that can save lives in emergencies. This service will make a real and significant difference in the lives of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and families – it will save lives,” says Andrea Palmer, Vice President of the Northern BC Family Hearing Society.

T9-1-1 allows any DHHSI person who has pre-registered their cellphone with their wireless carrier to communicate with police, fire and ambulance call-takers via text during an emergency. Callers must first place a voice call to 9-1-1 in order to establish a voice network connection and initiate the special messaging technology.

“We are pleased our DHHSI communities now have an improved way of communicating with local police, fire and ambulance services,” says Art Kaehn, RDFFG Board Chair. “I encourage people not to delay in registering for this service and to learn how to use it.”

“We are very proud to be able to offer Text with 9-1-1 services to our Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired residents. We appreciate all of the efforts that have made this service possible,” says Bill Miller, Chair of the Regional District of Bulkley Nechako.

“Bringing the Text with 9-1-1 service to the Northern Interior is a positive asset to our region. For DHHSI members to be able to reach this lifeline through a cellphone is a major improvement over outdated TTY (telephone typewriter) technology which is limited to landlines,” says Al Richmond, Chair of the Cariboo Regional District.

“We are excited to have this service available for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired residents in our region and their families. We hope those who are eligible register their phones with their mobile service provider so they can access the service if they need it,” says Stacey Tyers, Chair of the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine.

When E-Comm receives a 9-1-1 call from a DHHSI person who has pre-registered for the service, an alert will trigger at the 9-1-1 centre to indicate there is a DHHSI caller on the line. The 9-1-1 call-taker will then launch the special messaging system, allowing them to communicate with the caller through a special text session. This will ensure they get the emergency service they need.

The specialized technology was developed by Canada's telecommunications services providers and is available in select parts of the country.

"E-Comm was pleased to be the first 9-1-1 centre in Canada to launch T9-1-1 and we are ready to provide this important service to DHHSI residents in the northern interior regional districts," adds David Guscott, E-Comm President and CEO. "We are proud to have played a part in the development of this service which is a significant improvement over outdated TTY technology."

It is important to emphasize that this service is only available to the DHHSI community. Voice calling remains the only way to communicate with 9-1-1 services for a person who is not Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard-of-Hearing or Speech Impaired. Text messages sent directly to the digits "9-1-1" do not reach emergency services anywhere in Canada. Text with 9-1-1 for the public-at-large is anticipated in the future as the nationwide 9-1-1 infrastructure evolves.

Members of the DHHSI community should visit www.TextWith911.ca to register their cellphones with their wireless service provider and to learn more about how the system works.

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E-Comm would like to encourage DHHSI persons to register for T9-1-1 and to learn how this service works and in the event of an emergency, how to use the service. A variety of public education materials are available online at ecomm911.ca. Materials include a special user guide, infographic with registration tips and step-by-step video in American Sign Language that shows you how to register, how to make a 9-1-1 call and what will happen when you dial 9-1-1 using the Text with 9-1-1 service.

E-Comm is the largest 9-1-1 call centre in British Columbia and handles approximately 1.35 million emergency calls per year for Metro Vancouver and 24 other regional districts and communities spanning from Vancouver Island to Alberta and from the U.S. border, to north of Prince George. E-Comm also provides call-taking and dispatch services to 35 police and fire departments and operates the largest multi-jurisdictional, tri-service emergency radio system in the province.

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