

# 9-1-1 LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

*a Central Oklahoma Perspective*

October 2008

**911**  

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**saves lives**

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## The Technology Chase

There are three basic concerns that threaten the viability of continued E9-1-1 services in Oklahoma.

- (1) The rapid pace of evolving communications technology has necessitated tremendous system investments while eroding revenue sources. The original source for 9-1-1 funding, landline phone service, is declining rapidly. Unrealistic caps have been placed on the ability to increase revenues from newer technologies, yet adapting 9-1-1 systems to these newer technologies continually requires expensive system upgrades.
- (2) The Oklahoma Corporation Commission has historically had regulatory authority over the landline communications companies, but the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates new technologies such as wireless and VOIP companies, which hampers state and local efforts to resolve breakdowns of communication regarding processes necessary to best serve their customers and funding necessary for system improvements.
- (3) E9-1-1 services are not ubiquitous throughout our state. Some rural areas of the state have not been willing or able to generate the revenue needed to provide any type of E9-1-1 service.

## History

Enhanced 9-1-1 systems provide a critical component to efficient delivery of public safety services because they connect people in crisis situations to police, fire and ambulance professionals who can help them. E9-1-1 systems throughout the country offer not only the means to connect, but to connect with vital information about where the emergency is occurring, lifesaving information should the caller be unable to describe his or her location.

**Landline:** The quest for the most advanced 9-1-1 system began in Oklahoma in the mid 1980's, followed by state legislative authorization for local communities to hold elections to establish service fees on landline telephone customers (basically everyone back then). Central Oklahoma's enhanced 9-1-1

### **Recommendation:**

*We believe Oklahoma needs to evaluate a new methodology for funding the long-term viability of existing E9-1-1 systems in the state, and developing systems where there are none. Continuing to provide solutions by "chasing" technology is inefficient and inadequate. A system built on the technological possibilities and related funding mechanisms available in the 1980s simply will not carry us forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The citizens of this state expect and deserve a viable 9-1-1 system to connect them with the help they need in their moments of crisis.*

system became active May 1, 1989, following elections in the spring of 1987 in which voters throughout the metropolitan area voted by 88% margin in favor of such a service fee on their telephone bills to build out and maintain an E9-1-1 system. In accordance with the state authorizing legislation, these fees were based on a percentage of the basic landline subscription rate, in our case 5% for the first year and 3% for subsequent years. For a Southwestern Bell customer back then, that amounted to 65 cents/month and 39 cents/month respectively.

**Deregulation and wireless advancements:** The federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 deregulated the telephone industry bringing an onslaught of new players to the scene, requiring ACOG's 9-1-1 system to begin working with over 50 telecommunications companies rather than our original six. Then came the proliferation of cell phone use and the beginning evolution away from traditional landline to wireless services. Adapting 9-1-1 systems to this major technological shift required significant overhaul of 9-1-1 systems. A return to the legislature ultimately resulted in authorizing legislation for counties to go back to the people for a vote to charge themselves service fees on wireless phones to adapt the 9-1-1 system to be able to handle those calls and continue to provide the vital location and phone number information on which the E-9-1-1 systems were based. The legislation allowed a 50 cent per month fee but required new local elections. Once again, the citizens of Central Oklahoma showed strong support for funding 9-1-1 by an 80% plurality in elections held throughout the region Dec. 13, 2005.

The ACOG 9-1-1 system was upgraded accordingly and now provides call-takers with a latitude and longitude and mapped location of callers, regardless of their calls coming from a traditional landline phone or wireless phone. The legislature later adopted language to specifically add pre-paid wireless phone service customers. These actions and subsequent system improvements were just in time, because well over half of the calls that come into our system are now from wireless phones.

**VOIP:** But, no rest for the weary, as on the heels of this massive upgrade came the ability for voice communication through computer connections (Voice Over Internet Protocol—VOIP). 9-1-1 advocates returned to the legislature one more time to authorize charges to customers of VOIP for their ability to access to an E9-1-1 system. Recognizing that residents had shown strong support for funding viable 9-1-1 systems and that switching "phone" service. The legislature authorized cities and towns to approve a 50 cent service fee on VOIP customers.

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