

DETCOG Takes Region's 9-1-1 Network Into the Future

With the flip of a (digital) switch Wednesday, Deep East Texas became the second region in the state to complete the conversion to Next Generation 9-1-1 technology. After months of planning and preparation, the Deep East Texas Council of Governments, which administers the Emergency 9-1-1 Network for the 12-county region, announced that "NG9-1-1" call routing is now live throughout the region.

This new system routes calls to 9-1-1 dispatchers using geospatial routing, which allows calls to arrive faster and provides more accurate location information of those making calls to 9-1-1. DETCOG Regional 9-1-1 Director Van Bush also noted the changes make DETCOG's 9-1-1 system technology-proof and will allow further improvements to 9-1-1 services in the area over time. Call transfers between agencies will also be smoother.

"The old legacy 9-1-1 network was designed to accept calls from plain copper wire phones," Bush said. "We've had to make adjustments over the years to take care of wireless, voice over internet protocol (VOIP), and text messaging. The NG9-1-1 system is an all IP environment where those services are easier to handle, and other new services can be easily brought onboard in the future."

When a person in Deep East Texas encounters an emergency and dials 9-1-1, the call goes to one of 16 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) around the region. There is at least one PSAP in each county, and all now employ the new technology. DETCOG was designated as a "beta" Council of Governments to deploy NG9-1-1 early and document lessons learned, which will aid in the transition of other regional 9-1-1 networks in Texas.

"We've been talking about the need to move to a Next Generation 9-1-1 environment for years," Bush said. "There had to be a lot of planning and work to make this happen, not just us, but the county GIS coordinators in each county. It took thousands of hours of work put in to get the data quality we need for NG9-1-1 call routing."

"And it certainly could not have been done without the support of the Commission on State Emergency Communications (CSEC) which is the state's authority on emergency communications. CSEC is charged with administering the State 9-1-1 Service Program and is a valued partner. All of the funding for our program comes through them."

The improvements were made using network infrastructure provided by AT&T's Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet), which Bush touted as the backbone of DETCOG's NG 9-1-1 network.

"The Commission on State Emergency Communications congratulates the DETCOG 9-1-1 regional program for its leadership in the state program's transition to Next Generation 9-1-1," said CSEC Executive Director Kelli Merriweather. "This transition will ensure that DETCOG

continues to provide the excellent service it always has to its citizens both now and in the future as technology continues its rapid change.”

For the general public, little should change initially. The calls will simply go through more swiftly and locations will be more accurate, especially for wireless callers. For operators, the system comes with backend improvements and flexibility for the future.

DETCOG Executive Director Lonnie Hunt noted, “At the end of the day it’s all about public safety. The 9-1-1 network is a tool that connects citizens in an emergency to first responders. This enhancement will help save lives and better equip the responders. The old system served us for 50 plus years but was not designed for today’s digital world. NG9-1-1 makes things better now, but even more importantly it opens the door for new services and features that will be coming in the future.”

“It makes me proud to know we are leading the way,” Hunt added. I believe there are currently 24 PSAPs in the Texas CSEC program that have converted to NG9-1-1 and 16 of those are here in Deep East Texas. Van Bush and his staff, along with our county GIS coordinators, CSEC, and AT&T have all done a tremendous job getting this in place.”

###