



# Bonner County Sheriff's Office

## MEDIA RELEASE

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May 19, 2016

### 9-1-1 TEXT MESSAGES

The Bonner County Sheriff's Office is pleased to announce that the 9-1-1 center can now receive emergency text messages from cell phones with SMS capability. This feature enables citizens with a temporary or permanent disability, or any others who might not be able to make a voice call, to communicate their emergency to 9-1-1 via a text message. It also enables many who may be out of voice range to send 9-1-1 a text message. Sheriff Wheeler explains, "Folks who need emergency assistance in the back country of Bonner County or where there is spotty cell phone coverage can often send a text message when a voice connection cannot be made."

He further elaborated, "There are many delicate situations in which a citizen might not be able to make a voice call, but can quietly and clandestinely type out a text message for emergency assistance. So this new service has a number of situations that serve the public good."

The new service is being rolled out simultaneously in 9-1-1 dispatch centers in Bonner, Kootenai, and Shoshone counties, as well as in the Post Falls Police Department.

"Regional collaboration is critical to implement the next generation of 9-1-1 technology, and we are pleased to work with our partners in adjacent jurisdictions to implement this first step," says Wheeler. "The comprehensive system will eventually accept all sorts of data, such as images, video and audio recordings." With respect to working with other agencies, he comments, "When we collaborate, we can save lives. When we have an emergency near our borders, it makes cooperation between agencies so much more efficient when we share the same technology and have predesigned pathways for sharing information. This is exactly what we have done in this new text to 9-1-1 system in northern Idaho."

Bill Harp, Director of Technology at Bonner County, adds, "Sherriff Wheeler strongly supports the adoption of advanced technology for the entire public safety community: law, fire and EMS. His leadership and vision at 9-1-1 ensure that we have the best capability for the buck."

Sheriff Wheeler notes, "Smart devices have transformed our lives, bringing family and friends into constant communication. Certainly we need to ensure that these tools facilitate public safety and well-being for those for whom we care so much."

The service is available right now to those having SMS text services with AT&T, Sprint, Verizon, T-Mobile and Comcast. Other providers may support the service. Contact your cell phone service provider (not 9-1-1) to inquire if they provide support for text to 9-1-1. Notice that, from the point of view of the law, a text to 9-1-1 is the same type of service as making a 9-1-1 voice call, so its use is strictly for emergency assistance messages only. Here are the guidelines for using text to 9-1-1: Citizens should "call if you can,

text if you can't." Use text to 9-1-1 only when a voice call is not possible; a voice call is far more efficient than a text message that can potentially be delayed by network traffic as it travels to the 9-1-1 center.

- Type 911 in the "To" box.
- Communicate your exact location, as best you can, and a brief description of the nature of the emergency; then hit "Send."
- Do not use slang or abbreviations, so there is no guessing about the nature of your emergency.
- Be prepared to respond to the queries and instructions of the 9-1-1 operator.

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