ST. CHARLES COUNTY

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TEXT-TO-911 SERVICE LAUNCHES IN ST. CHARLES COUNTY

ST. CHARLES COUNTY, MO – St. Charles County residents and those traveling through the county now can use text-to-911 on mobile devices at times when a 911 call is not safe or practical. This service is the latest step in a county-wide upgrade of the 911 system.

"St. Charles County is one of only a handful of counties and municipalities in Missouri that have text-to-911. Its implementation takes our outstanding public safety services to another level," says County Executive Steve Ehlmann. "Credit goes to our Department of Emergency Communications and the cities of Lake Saint Louis, O'Fallon, St. Charles, St. Peters, and Wentzville for their work in making this service a reality."

The increased dependence on cell phones was a key driver in bringing text-to-911 to St. Charles County. "More than 70 percent of 911 calls now are received from a wireless device," says St. Charles County Director of Emergency Communications Jeff Smith. "To have this service available when it's not safe to make a voice call, or for those who are deaf, have difficulty hearing, or have a speech disability, adds an additional layer of enhanced functionality to our system."

A call to 911 still is the preferred form of communication during an emergency, but there may be situations – a home invasion or a domestic violence incident, for example – when texting for help is safer. Texting also may be more convenient for those with hearing or speech disabilities than a TTD or TTY device.

Text-to-911 has the same results as a 911 call, but with added safeguards for texting:

- A citizen text comes in to the 911 system and their approximate location appears for the dispatcher on a computer-based map.
- The dispatcher texts the citizen back to confirm the phone number and location, and asks if it is safe to call. If the answer is no, the dispatcher will continue to text.
- The dispatcher will keep messages simple and to the point, using simple words and avoiding text lingo or abbreviations. The citizen texting is encouraged to do the same.

Texting 911 is simple:

- Enter the numbers 911 in the "To" field of the text message on a mobile device.
- Send a brief message: location and type of emergency.

Following are additional important considerations regarding the technology behind text-to-911, as well as safety and legal issues:

- Abuse of the text-to-911 system, such as texting fake emergencies, carries the same legal ramifications in the state of Missouri as abuse of 911 calls (§ 190.308.1, RSMo 2016).
- St. Charles County's text-to-911 service works only in this county.
- A text or data plan is required to place a text to 911.

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- Photos and videos cannot be sent via text-to-911.
- A text to 911 can only be between a dispatcher and one citizen– no group texts.
- Text-to-911 is not available in "roaming" mode.
- As with all text messages, 911 text messages can take time to receive, may be delivered out of order, or may not be received at all. The sender should receive a "not delivered" message from their wireless carrier if a text did not go through.
- For safety reasons, text-to-911 should not be used while driving.

The upgrade of the County's 911 system, which began in 2015, was necessary to keep up with technology and the abundance of wireless 911 calls. Calls are answered by Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs) located throughout the county. All PSAPs, including those managed by the cities of Lake Saint Louis, O'Fallon, St. Charles, St. Peters, and Wentzville, as well as the St. Charles County Department of Emergency Communications, operates a Motorola Solutions Emergency CallWorks cloud-based 911 system. Features of the system include off-site equipment for emergency back-up; map-based caller identification; and the ability for dispatchers to log in from any PSAP location. All St. Charles County PSAPs have adopted the same policies and procedures for handling and responding to text-to-911 messages.

For more information about text-to-911 and the new 911 system, visit sccmo.org/EmergencyCommunications.

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Founded in 1812, St. Charles County is one of the fastest growing counties in Missouri, and the state's third largest county in both population and economic share. St. Charles County consistently ranks one of the healthiest places to live in Missouri in the County Health Rankings report published by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. It is home to 12 scenic county parks encompassing more than 2,800 acres with additional land under development and more in reserve for future development.

With a population of 385,840, St Charles County is home to large employers including General Motors, Citi, MasterCard Worldwide and Boeing. It is ranked among the top 25 counties in the nation in high-tech job growth by the Progressive Policy Institute and consistently has the lowest unemployment rate in the Metropolitan St. Louis area.

St. Charles County Government employs nearly 1,100 in more than 30 departments and offices, who work to make the county an excellent place to live, work and shop. For more information, please visit www.sccmo.org.