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National Emergency  
Number Association



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## **America's 9-1-1 System Needs Major Modernization, Local Leaders Tell Congress**

*Stakeholders Being Convened to Develop Solutions*

**Washington, D.C., March 5, 2003** – America's vital 9-1-1 system, struggling to keep up with both technological changes and funding demands, needs a new, long-term vision that guarantees public safety for the future, an official with a key public safety organization testified before Congress today.

Before the Senate Communications Subcommittee, John Melcher, president of the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), told lawmakers "there is much to applaud in the many broad-based efforts to implement E9-1-1, however the goal of E9-1-1 'anywhere and everywhere' remains elusive. We must move past the rhetoric and truly address the systemic issues of E9-1-1 implementation."

The "E" in E9-1-1 stands for enhanced 9-1-1 services which would automatically provide a call-back number and location of the caller. The implementation and deployment of E9-1-1 is critical to the future of emergency communications.

To examine and address the global and systemic challenges affecting E9-1-1 deployment, NENA has launched the Strategic Wireless Action Team (SWAT). This effort has engaged all of the relevant stakeholders —wireless and wireline telecommunications companies, state and local organizations, and public safety groups—to identify priorities and determine the changes needed to improve the country's 9-1-1 system.

"Our focus is on solutions," Melcher said. "The NENA SWAT participants will develop a comprehensive recommendation that examines the economic, technological, operational, policy and political implications of potential E9-1-1 solutions while balancing multiple private interests with public policy goals. A proactive, consensus-driven plan will be announced late this spring."

### ***9-1-1 System Under Stress from New Demands, New Technologies***

For more than 30 years, Americans have relied on 9-1-1 services to summon emergency medical, fire and police protection. But the complex system behind 9-1-1 is showing its age. Americans rely on a system that is increasingly outdated, inadequately funded, and stressed further by the demands of homeland security and new wireless and digital communications technologies.

"Although the current 9-1-1 system covers 99% of the U.S. population, only 1% of the nation's emergency jurisdictions can identify the location of calls made from wireless phones," Melcher said. "This is just one issue that SWAT will be focusing on as it addresses all of the challenges surrounding 9-1-1 services."

### *New Congressional Caucus Focusing Attention on Issue*

Melcher commended the recent formation of the bipartisan, bicameral Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus. The caucus was formed by Senators Conrad Burns (R-Mont.) and Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) and Reps. Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.) and John Shimkus (R-Ill.) to educate lawmakers, constituents and communities about the importance of citizen-activated emergency response systems.

The four co-chairs outlined goals for the caucus ranging from emergency service parity in rural America to more rapid deployment of up-to-date technologies.

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A not-for-profit corporation, the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) is the only educational organization dedicated solely to the study, advancement and implementation of 9-1-1 as America's universal emergency number. With the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders and public safety entities, NENA has an individual membership of more than 7,000 public safety executives, and is organized into 46 chapters. The organization strives to provide an effective and accessible 9-1-1 service for North America, measuring its success in the lives saved by 9-1-1 each day. NENA also develops recommended operating standards and protocol for 9-1-1 services from its headquarters in Columbus, Ohio. For a full copy of Melcher's testimony, visit [www.nena.org](http://www.nena.org).