



EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
11:00 am, June 12, 2003

CONTACT: Dale Curtis
1-800-332-3911 or 202-715-1520
Nena_media@yahoo.com

Telecom and Public Safety Leaders Issue “Call to Action”: Urge Governments to Make Enhanced 9-1-1 A Top Priority

Emergency Call Centers Struggling With Wireless Phone Boom, Homeland Security

Washington, D.C. – Upgrading local 9-1-1 systems so that they can instantly identify the location of a wireless caller must become one of America’s top public policy priorities, leading public safety and telecom officials insisted today.

In an “E9-1-1 Call to Action” press conference in Washington, DC, the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) said the number of emergency call centers with precise location technology for wireless 9-1-1 callers jumped from 299 to 643 between February and May of this year, a welcome indication of growing momentum.¹ But NENA said that figure is still just 10% of the 6,121 emergency call centers nationwide. And 407 U.S. counties either have no 9-1-1 service at all, or can only receive voice calls with no data on the caller’s physical location or call back number.

In the press conference, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Powell, NENA, wireless and wireline phone companies, and other public safety organizations pledged to continue working together to tackle any systemic obstacles to progress. They also challenged federal, state and local policy makers to boost the priority given to enhanced or “E9-1-1” systems.

“Our nation’s 9-1-1 system is falling short of what is needed to keep up with new technologies and challenges,” said John Melcher, president of the National Emergency Number Association and deputy director of the Greater Harris County 9-1-1 Emergency Network in Houston. “Today, all of us who are directly responsible for improving that system are standing together to send the clearest possible message: Our federal, state and local leaders must work together with telecom companies to accelerate progress on E9-1-1. Our lives, our property and our homeland security are at stake.”

In a related development, two co-chairs of the Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus, Senators Conrad Burns (R-MT) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY), today introduced legislation designed to speed E9-1-1 implementation and improve coordination among all levels of

¹ Based on NENA’s preliminary assessment of the most recent FCC quarterly filings on 5/1/03.

government. NENA welcomed the legislation as a helpful contribution to the overall effort to spur more action at all levels.

Two Key Challenges

Approximately 93 percent of the nation's emergency call centers (called PSAPs, or public safety answering points) have "enhanced" 9-1-1 (E9-1-1) for wireline callers, which means automated systems can identify the caller's number and physical location, and route the call to a PSAP designated for that location. But only about 10 percent of the country's call centers are capable of determining the precise location of at least some of the wireless callers dialing 9-1-1.

There are two primary reasons for this situation: the stress on local emergency response systems from the enormous growth in wireless telephony, and the improper siphoning of public funds that have been set aside to upgrade the 9-1-1 system.

As wireless phones have proliferated, so have wireless 9-1-1 calls. Depending on the local area, 25 to 60 percent of all calls to 9-1-1 come from wireless phones, for a total of nearly 140 million nationwide. Yet most local call centers lack the technology needed to pinpoint callers' location so that help can be sent quickly.

Compounding the problem, in many states and localities, the money collected from wireless customers for the purpose of upgrading the 9-1-1 system has been diverted to other purposes or withheld. Even though wireless subscribers think the "9-1-1 surcharge" on their monthly bill is going to improve their safety, too often the money is being siphoned off to pay for something else. Last year, state agencies diverted \$53 million in California, \$9 million in Oregon, \$10 million in Rhode Island, \$5 million in North Carolina and \$6 million in Washington state to other projects from taxes collected for E911 implementation, according to audit reports.

"Obviously, policy makers face tough choices in the current budget environment," Melcher said. "But with lives and homeland security at stake, it's just common sense that 9-1-1 funds should be preserved and invested in 9-1-1 systems."

A Partnership for Progress

NENA's members and allies have been at the forefront of creating public-private partnerships that will solve the crisis. Under the banner of NENA's Strategic Wireless Action Team (SWAT), stakeholder organizations are working together on an "action plan" to accelerate progress in the near term, and to maintain the system in the face of future technological advances. Over the last six months, the NENA-SWAT Stakeholders' Initiative has commissioned a great deal of analytical work and considered a variety of policy approaches. The stakeholders are committed to developing technical and policy measures on an ongoing basis, with the next milestone for measuring progress in the late fall of 2003.

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. For more information, visit www.nena.org.