

## No E9-1-1 for now

August 5 2005

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Not all mobile-phone users will be able to access emergency operators by next year -- if they get into a horrific car accident, or observe a violent crime in progress -- even though a government deadline requiring enhanced 9-1-1 is looming, experts told UPI's Wireless World.

Verizon Wireless, one of the nation's largest mobile-phone carriers, notified the Federal Communications Commission this week that it could not meet a Dec. 31 deadline to ensure 95 percent of its customers had E9-1-1 capable handsets. Rival Nextel also has requested an extension of the deadline from the FCC. Other carriers are expected to make similar disclosures shortly.

"We're starting to hear a lot of grumblings, and there is every indication that we will see petitions for an extension of the deadline from other mobile carriers," said Derek Kerton, an analyst with The Kerton Group in San Jose, Calif., a research consultancy for the mobile industry.

A number of factors have combined to create this dangerous situation. For example, Verizon noted in its Aug. 1 filing with the FCC -- a copy of which was obtained by Wireless World -- that 12 percent of its customers have refused to upgrade to newer-model mobile phones featuring global-positioning-system technology for financial reasons. This is despite promotions and other sales incentives. Other carriers have faced the same difficulties.

"The carriers cannot control how many of their customers buy new handsets," Kerton said.

Another factor -- one not talked about openly by many in government, experts said -- is many local governments have failed to upgrade their 9-1-1 call centers to handle mobile-phone calls. This is despite more than a decade of taxation of monthly mobile-phone bills to pay for the opening of state-of-the-art facilities for police and fire department emergency operators.

"Many local governments have balanced their budgets by using the funds from the mobile-phone taxes," Kerton said. "One government body that I know of used the money to buy leather boots."

This is nothing short of a scandal, some experts said.

"In most municipalities, 50 percent of the calls being made to police call centers are from mobile phones," said Andrew "Flip" Filipowski, the famed technology investor who has invested in public-safety technology systems maker Interact in Winston-Salem, N.C. "This is an extremely critical issue. Delays will cost lives."

Nevertheless, the FCC appears to be headed to granting the extension to the mobile carriers.

"This is going to be the first of many extensions," said Greg Murphy, chief operating officer of AirWave Wireless in San Mateo, Calif. "The whole idea of 9-1-1 is premised on the idea that the police or fire know where you are and who you are when you call, but that premise is based on landline phone technology -- not wireless. Most people don't even know that mobile phones don't work like a landline when it comes to 9-1-1. The industry had better be upfront with them about that."

Kerton said he thinks the FCC will put pressure on the mobile carriers, telling them they should have pushed harder for their customers to purchase the new handsets and to update their call centers. In many

locales, police and fire cannot even communicate directly with each other over the call-center systems.

"That's somewhat ironic," Kerton said, "given that there have been 12 years of taxes to finance this kind of service."

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