

Carriers dragging feet on E911?

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A number of telecom carriers may not meet next month's Federal Communications Commission deadline to implement 911 emergency call services for Internet telephony, experts tell United Press International's The Web.

The deadline of Nov. 28 may have to be extended -- by up to two years -- and a number of companies are petitioning for an extension right now.

"The telcos have been dragging their feet on this forever," Robert Schwaninger, an attorney who practices before the FCC in Washington D.C., told The Web.

The primary concerns are technical. Originally, Internet-telephony providers, which route calls over the Internet, thought they could use technology to locate callers through "triangulation" of signals, so fire and police authorities could be directed to them in an emergency, said Schwaninger.

"They realized it's not good in dealing with tall buildings," he said.

Carriers started looking at other technologies to extend the reach of 911 to callers dialing over the Internet. The latest idea is to use Global Positioning System functionality within a mobile telephone unit itself. "Standards need to be created on this, though," said Schwaninger. "It's a question of standards and methodologies of deployment."

Some firms are resorting to proprietary technology in order to meet the

looming FCC deadline. Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.-based VoIP Inc. last month debuted the industry's first private Voice over Internet Protocol 911 service. The service works for both broadband and packet-switched Internet connections. "The industry has been focused on creating quick solutions to meet FCC deadlines related to recent regulatory actions that require VoIP services to customers," said Steven Ivester, chief executive officer of VoIP Inc. "Some of these solutions continue to use unsecured, and best-effort transport of the Internet for critical emergency calls."

The company's technology, however, uses five redundant entry points for IP 911 -- sometimes called E911 calls -- to enter the network through private peering or the Internet. These entry points are strategically placed geographically to provide the shortest path for a phone call originating anywhere in the United States. Once the call is received on the network, the call is routed to the proper Public Safety Answering Point, e.g., a fire or police emergency call center.

Since the calls are routed over the Internet, building in redundancy was a key to maintain the level of service quality and security that consumers expect -- based on generations of use of regular 911 services from wireline telephones.

Other technology approaches are coming to market, too. A company called Pannaway Technologies, based in Portsmouth, N.H., has developed a "next generation" IP access platform to deliver VoIP emergency calls, a spokeswoman for the firm told The Web. Interestingly, the technology provides an "automatic failover" to a backup Plain Old Telephone System (POTS), she added.

The reason for this approach is simple but is often unstated. "IP telephony service providers often provide their services through networks they themselves do not control," Steve Mank, chief operating officer of Qovia, based in Frederick, Md., told The Web. "That lack of

ownership provides a significant challenge in meeting this requirement. The abstract nature of the Internet is what enables the ubiquitous way that we use it. But it also prevents any current means of automating location tracking. Who's to know that you are calling from a coffee shop, your house, or your hotel room? Even if you are prompted to put in that information, how reliable will you be? Will you answer as if your life depends upon it? It just might," said Mank.

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