

US to modernize 911 emergency service

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During the 2007 mass shooting at Virginia Tech, desperate students attempted to text the 911 emergency service.

The messages never arrived. The 911 system was unable to handle texts.

The US [Federal Communications Commission](#) cited the Virginia Tech tragedy as it announced Tuesday it was planning to modernize the emergency communications system to include text, phone and video messages.

"911 is an indispensable, live-saving tool," FCC chairman Julius Genachowski said in a speech to public safety officials in Arlington, Virginia, outside Washington.

"But today's 911 system doesn't support the communication tools of tomorrow," Genachowski said.

"Even though mobile phones are the device of choice for most 911 callers, and we primarily use our phones to text, right now, you can't text 911," he said.

"If you find yourself in an emergency situation and want to send a text for help, you can pretty much text anyone except a 911 call center," he said.

"It's time to bring 911 into the digital age."

According to the FCC, Americans place more than 237 million calls to the 911 emergency number every year, or 650,000 per day.

It said that 70 percent of 911 calls come from mobile phones, many of which are able to send text messages, pictures and videos.

"These new technologies have the potential to revolutionize [emergency response](#) by providing public safety officials with critical real-time, on-the-ground information," the FCC said.

The FCC said if the text messages sent by students at Virginia Tech had gone through, "[first responders](#) may have arrived on the scene faster with firsthand intelligence about the life-threatening situation that was unfolding."

Virginia Tech was the scene of the worst school shooting in US history when Cho Seung-Hui, a 23-year-old student, shot 32 classmates and teachers to death before killing himself.

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