

TEXTS HAVE NOT BURDENED PSAPS, LOCAL OFFICIALS SAY

The deployment of text-to-911 services has not overwhelmed public safety answering points (PSAPs), three local PSAP officials said today.

Speaking during a session this morning at the National Emergency Number Association's 911 Goes to Washington event, the PSAP officials also stressed the importance of continuing education to the public that people should call 911 centers if possible, rather than text as a first option, during emergencies.

"Our staff was scared to death" that texts from the public would overwhelm operations, said Allyson Burrell, deputy director of the Charleston County (S.C.) Consolidated 9-1-1 Center.

"They were really worried that they were going to be overwhelmed," agreed Brianna Fields, deputy director of the Benton County (Ark.) Office of Emergency Communications.

But the local officials said that has not occurred.

Rob McMullen, executive director of Vigo County 911 in Indiana, said that his center received 277 texts last year. He said he and a colleague try to debunk the myths about text-to-911 at conferences.

Ms. Burrell said her PSAP gets an average of 60-65 texts a month, about a dozen of which "are legitimate." "It is not anything that is overwhelming to the staff," she added.

Ms. Fields said her center got just under 80 in 2016.

The officials suggested that lawsuits that have been filed against some PSAPs that are not prepared to receive texts will prompt many to take action.

The session's moderator, FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn, said that just more than 20% of U.S. residents live in area where they can text a 911 center. "Now this is significant progress, but we still have a long way to go," she said.

Ms. Clyburn also said that "some jurisdictions are worried that text-to-911 will add cost or be a strain for PSAP personnel. But there is good news to report: Virtually all of the PSAPs that have implemented text-to-911 thus far report that they have been able to make the transition smoothly without disrupting operations."

In 2014, the FCC adopted a second report and order requiring wireless carriers and interconnected, over-the-top (OTT) texting providers by year-end to be capable of deploying text-to-911 services (TRDaily, Aug. 8, 2014). Providers would have to offer text-to-911 offerings within six months of a valid public safety answering point (PSAP) request.

“We still definitely have a role to play in really debunking many of the myths,” Ms. Clyburn added of the FCC. - Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

TRDaily - February 27, 2017

Copyright © 2017, Telecommunications Reports International, Inc.