

WASHINGTON COUNTY

MATT A. THOMAS, Sheriff

262 East Court
Weiser, Idaho 83672
(208) 414-2121
Fax: (208) 414-2536



Washington County, Idaho - People who need emergency help in Washington County now have the ability to text 911 dispatchers for service. AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon customers can send a text to 911 in an emergency. The service can be used by most pre-paid cell phones as well. "As long as the pre-paid service is in conjunction with one of the four major carriers, Sprint, AT&T, Verizon or T-Mobile." Text to 9-1-1 should only be used in an emergency situation, when placing a call is not possible like if the caller is deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired, or when speaking out loud would put the caller in danger. The program, known as "Text-to-911," enables people to open a new text message and enter "911" as the recipient and then indicate their exact location and the nature of their emergency in the text message. Sheriff Thomas says a voice call is still the most reliable way for dispatchers to locate a person who needs help.

Washington County officials still urge people to call 911 unless it is unsafe or impractical, because communicating by text message is slower, particularly if a dispatcher needs to ask questions about the emergency. When texting 9-1-1, it's important to understand:

- Your first message should contain the location of the emergency (including city) and the type of help needed, if known (police, fire or medical).
- The text messages should be brief and concise, and use full words.
- Stay with your phone, be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 911 call taker.
- Photos and videos cannot be sent to 911 at this time. Emergency dispatchers are going to need detailed information to ensure they send the right help to the right place, so they will ask for additional information about the emergency to relay to the first responders.

It is important to remember a voice call to 911 will usually get help on the way more quickly and more reliably. That's why we ask you to **Call if you can, Text if you can't.**

If there is an emergency and you are unable to make a call, remember these steps:

- Don't text and drive
- In the first text message send the location and type of emergency.
- Text in simple words. Be brief but don't use abbreviations or slang.
- Be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 911 dispatcher responding to your text. Don't Abuse 911. **Text-to-911 service is ONLY for emergencies.**
- It is a crime to text or call 911 with a false report.

Important to remember:

- A text or data plan is required to place a Text-to-911
- As with all text messages, messages to 911 may take longer to receive, may get out of order, or may not be received at all.
- If you do not receive a text response from 911, attempt to call – even if you can't speak.
- Photos and videos cannot be sent to 911 at this time.
- Text to 911 cannot include more than one person. Do not send your emergency text as part of a group message. 911 can be the only recipient.
- **Voice calls are still the best and fastest way to contact 911 Remember, Text-to-911 service is not available everywhere in Idaho or the U.S.**

