NG9-1-1: Get ready, here it comes

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While much has been said and written about the advanced capabilities of Internet Protocol (IP)-based Next Generation 9-1-1 technology, many communications officials believe that the migration to NG9-1-1 can be forestalled indefinitely, perhaps forever, and that the logistical and cost considerations of such a migration provide ample incentive for doing so.

The reality, however, is that NG9-1-1 is a fait accompli, for three very important reasons. First, commercial carriers already are transitioning to digital IP-based technology and have announced that in just a few years they no longer will support legacy analog systems and equipment—including the customer premises equipment (CPE) that 9-1-1 centers currently use to handle emergency calls.

The second key driver concerns public perception and expectations. Users of IP-based smartphones and tablets communicate in a variety of ways beyond voice—they text, tweet, and exchange video and images—and they expect that the 9-1-1 centers that serve them are able to communicate in the same ways. Increasingly they are exerting pressure on government officials to ensure that this happens.

Finally, NG9-1-1 represents the gold standard of 9-1-1 center communications. While 9-1-1 texting currently is receiving most of the attention, it represents only the tip of the iceberg regarding the advanced capabilities that NG9-1-1 technology can provide. Most important of these will be the ability to share data between PSAPs and to reroute calls seamlessly when circumstances warrant, such as when misdirected 9-1-1 calls occur or when a PSAP has been rendered inoperable due to a disaster.

So, every 9-1-1 center nationwide sooner or later will migrate to NG9-1-1. Here are a few things you can do right now to get ready:

- First, examine the funding legislation that currently exists in your state. Many states still have laws on the books that are wireline centric; if they aren’t amended, the available funding will be hard-pressed to facilitate a migration to NG9-1-1.
- Second, examine the quality of the geospatial data for the PSAPs and responding agencies in your jurisdiction. In a NG9-1-1 environment, this data will be used to locate 9-1-1 emergency callers—ergo, it needs to be of the highest quality possible.
- Third, look for new ways to provision systems and equipment, and keep an open mind. Consider regional deployments and hosted/managed solutions. Both will reduce the cost of NG9-1-1 deployment for individual 9-1-1 centers. In addition,
regional deployments will enhance communications interoperability, while hosted/managed solutions will bring capabilities to smaller 9-1-1 centers that otherwise would be beyond their reach.

The advent of NG9-1-1 shouldn't frighten you—rather, it should excite you, because it will bring advanced capabilities to 9-1-1 centers that in turn will help emergency responders do a better job of protecting the citizenry, while keeping them safer. As such, NG9-1-1 should be supported—indeed, embraced—by multiple agencies across all levels of government.