

Subject: Emergency 911 calls and Skills-based routing

Emergency 911 calls

Emergency 911 calls should be routed to a specific group of 911-trained video interpreters. For reasons of reliability and redundancy, these interpreters should be in various locations throughout the country. Furthermore, the criteria for selecting these specialized interpreters should include: (1) high level of interpreting skill and (2) ability to handle difficult and stressful situations. These interpreters should undergo continued evaluation by consumers who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

All VRS interpreters should have frequent, substantive, face-to-face training. This is especially true for interpreters handling 911 calls. Training that consists primarily of written materials or scripted, prepared videos is not adequate. Live, interactive training can be provided remotely using current technology. If emergency-call services for VRS users is to be commensurate to those for hearing consumers--and they should be--then training for 911 VRS interpreters should be just as rigorous as the training required of 911 dispatchers. It is critical that only highly qualified interpreters process 911 VRS calls.

Skills-Based Routing

Many Deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals want to have control at times over who interprets VRS calls for them. They want to create a roster of their own selected VRS interpreters based on language fluency and cultural understanding. If none of their selected interpreters are available, they would choose whether (1) to keep waiting for one of their selected interpreters to become available or (2) to be routed to the general queue.

Sincerely,
Ken Alexander
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