

Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC

In the Matter of)
E911 Requirements for IP-Enabled) WC Docket No.05-196
Service Providers)

COMMENTS OF THE
CENTRAL STATION ALARM ASSOCIATION

The Central Station Alarm Association, and the related Alarm Industry Communications Committee (collectively, CSAA), by its attorneys, hereby submit comments on the Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM)¹ in the above-captioned proceeding. In the NPRM, the Commission asks for comments on additional steps that it should take to ensure that providers of voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services provide ubiquitous and reliable E911 service. By these comments, CSAA asks the Commission to consider public safety requirements that should be imposed on VoIP providers in addition to E911. Specifically, CSAA asks the Commission to impose notification and non-interference requirements on VoIP providers to protect the safety interests of subscribers to central station alarm services.

CSAA is a trade association that represents companies providing central station electrical protection services that are certified by the Underwriters Laboratories, Factory Mutual, and similar risk-rating agencies. CSAA's members protect a wide range of sensitive facilities and their occupants from fire, burglaries, sabotage and other emergencies. Protected facilities include government offices, power plants, hospitals,

¹ *IP-Enabled Services; E911 Requirements for IP-Enabled Service Providers*, First Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket Nos. 04-36 and 05-196, FCC 05-116, (rel. June 3, 2005) (NPRM).

dam and water authorities, pharmaceutical plants, chemical plants, banks, and schools and universities. In addition to these commercial and governmental applications, central station alarm operations protect an increasing number of residences and their occupants from intruders, burglary, and fire. Currently, an estimated 23% of homes in the United States and their occupants are protected by central station alarm operations. Alarm companies also provide medical alert services for obtaining ambulances in the event of medical emergencies.

Central station alarm operations are dependent upon reliable and uninterrupted telecommunications service to monitor the alarm systems of their business and residential customers, and to report potential emergency situations to the appropriate public safety agencies. Accordingly, central station alarm operations were developed to work efficiently and effectively with the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN).

Based on its responsibility to promote safety of life and property, the Commission adopted rules to require VoIP providers that are interconnected to the PSTN to provide E911 service. The Commission found that imposing an E911 requirement is reasonably ancillary to its responsibility under the Act for making available "a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide, and world-wide wire and radio communication service... for the purpose of *promoting safety of life and property* through the use of wire and radio communication."² The Commission's rules require interconnected VoIP providers to transmit all 911 calls, as well as a call back number and the caller's Registered Location for each call, to the appropriate emergency authority.³ Further, the Commission requires that the E911

² *Id.* at ¶29, citing 47 U.S.C. §151 (emphasis in original).

³ *Id.* at ¶37.

service must be a standard feature of the VoIP service and not an optional feature.⁴ The Commission also requires all providers of interconnected VoIP service to advise every subscriber of “the circumstances under which E911 service may not be available ... or may be in some way limited by comparison to traditional E911 service.”⁵ Interconnected VoIP service providers also must distribute warning stickers or other appropriate labels to all subscribers “warning subscribers if E911 service may be limited or not available...”.⁶

In the NPRM, the Commission asks for comment on additional steps it should take to ensure that providers of interconnected VoIP services provide ubiquitous and reliable E911 service. The Commission states that “while a provider of VoIP service enjoys the opportunity to introduce new and exciting public interest benefits to the communications marketplace, and to profit from those offerings, that opportunity brings with it the responsibility to ensure that public safety is protected.”⁷

CSAA agrees with the Commission that VoIP providers have a responsibility to ensure that public safety is protected. However, with respect to the subscribers to central station alarm service, this responsibility cannot be met solely by extending access to E911. Rather, just as the public relies on access to E911, subscribers to central station alarm operations rely on these services for personal, home, and business protection. Thus, VoIP providers should be required to ensure that they do not interfere with other public safety mechanisms employed by subscribers, such as central station alarm services. At a minimum, VoIP providers should be required to determine whether a new VoIP customer has alarm service and to notify and work with the alarm company before

⁴ Id. at ¶47.

⁵ Id. at ¶48.

⁶ Id.

cutting over the customer's service in order to ensure that alarm service is not degraded, interrupted or terminated.

The need for such requirements is not theoretical. Alarm companies have been encountering an increasing number of problems when their customers replace traditional wireline telephone service with VoIP service. As detailed in CSAA's comments in the IP-Enabled Services proceeding, some VoIP providers install their service by cutting the connections of their new subscribers to the PSTN and replace them with connections to the Internet that disconnect alarm panels entirely or connect them in a manner that impairs their ability to seize the lines they need to send alarm data to central stations. CSAA members have reported such problems caused by cable television companies that offer VoIP service via cable modems and with non-cable VoIP providers such as Vonage. In addition, many existing digital communicator alarm control panel formats are not compatible with some VoIP services and may preclude alarm data from being reliably transmitted to central stations.

When a VoIP provider fails to connect the customer's alarm panel to the new VoIP wiring and/or fails to provide an effective communication path to the alarm central station, the customer's alarm protection has been terminated. Unfortunately, in most cases customers will not realize this until an emergency situation occurs and their alarm system does not work.

Differences in the PSTN and the network of VoIP providers also may affect the functioning of a customer's alarm system. For example, with a PSTN connection, a loss of dialtone tells the alarm control panel that the line is disconnected or that PSTN service

⁷ Id. at ¶56.

is not available. This may not be the case with a VoIP network. In addition, the PSTN provides battery back-up power for 24 hours. This ability also is not available universally with VoIP. The result is that alarm customers have changed their telephone service from a traditional wireline carrier to a VoIP provider without realizing that their alarm system may no longer work at all or that it may not work the same in some circumstances, and without anyone notifying the alarm company of the change.

If the central station alarm provider is notified of the conversion, however, it may be able to resolve some or all of the issues that otherwise would result in a loss of effective alarm service. To the extent certain issues could not be resolved, the central station alarm provider would be able to inform the customer of any limitations or changes in the customer's alarm service that may result from the conversion to VoIP. While such notification is no replacement for a fully functioning alarm system, at least the customer will not be operating under the false impression that there is no change in his alarm system and the level of protection it provides.

CSAA believes that such a requirement is consistent with the Commission's Title I responsibility to promote "safety of life and property." It also is consistent with the notification requirements imposed by the Commission on VoIP providers in connection with E911 service, whereby the Commission requires providers of interconnected VoIP service to advise subscribers of the circumstances under which E911 service may not be available or may be limited in comparison to traditional E911 service.

Accordingly, CSAA requests that the Commission adopt the recommendations contained herein.

Respectfully submitted,

CENTRAL STATION ALARM ASSOCIATION

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Kelly Laraia, do hereby certify that I have on this 15th day of August, 2005, had copies of the Comments of the Central Station Alarm Association, delivered to the following, via electronic mail:

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