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FCC: Two-thirds of Delco 911 calls give wrong locations

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Two-thirds of calls to Delaware County's 911 center in September made from wireless phones had inaccurate location information, according to data released Tuesday by the Federal Communications Commission.

And, evidently, the problem is widespread.

Nationwide, last year about 73 million wireless calls came through with inaccurate information, said Jaime Barnett, executive director of FindMe 911, a group of public safety professionals concerned with the accuracy of caller information.

It so happened that the Delaware County data was released because, "We were the ones that filed the initial complaint with the FCC," said Edwin J. Truitt, director of Delaware County's Emergency Services.

Without accurate data, 911 operators have to ask callers where they are located. So far in Delaware County there hasn't been an issue where first responders have been unable to find the callers, Truitt said.

At issue is the "Phase II" data, which uses satellite technology to supply latitude and longitude coordinates for the calls; the "Phase I" data provides only a cell tower location.

The issue developed when wireless carriers began using GPS, Barnett said. "GPS just doesn't work for the way the majority of the calls are made - wireless and indoors," said Barnett. "Technology exists [to fix the issue] we just need the FCC to move forward without delay."

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FCC: 911 calls have inaccurate location information

By Danielle Lynch, Delaware County Daily Times

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The Federal Communications Commission recently released a report that shows about two-thirds of the wireless phone calls that were received at the county's 911 Center in Middletown in September did not include accurate location information.

James Barnett, director of the Find Me 911 Coalition, said his coalition believes the problem is more widespread across the nation. He said officials in California notified the FCC about a similar problem back in August. It started to become an issue when wireless carriers began upgrading to GPS, according to Barnett, who is also former chief of the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau.

Edwin Truitt, director of the Delaware County Emergency Services Department, said his department notified officials at the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, who then notified the Federal Communications Commission.

Truitt said the issue relates to so-called Phase II technology, which refers to the location of the wireless caller. He said it needs to be fixed, especially as counties look to implement so-called "Next Generation" technology, which would include allowing residents to contact the 911 Center via text messages in an emergency situation.

"We have to know where you are when you call 911 in order to make the proper response," he said.

Truitt said while the 911 call-takers can eventually pinpoint the location while talking to the caller on the cellphone, it could become a larger problem when a text message option becomes available.

About 145,000 individuals, as well as members of national and local public safety organizations, who are concerned about the accuracy of the locations of 911 calls belong to the Find Me 911 Coalition, according to Barnett.