

Share and Share Alike

By Kim Stokes, Editor-in -Chief, kstokes@cahners.com



In the aftermath of September 11th, the status of current and future wireless infrastructure has been a hot topic. How could folks buried in rubble at the World Trade Center make cell phone calls, but people on the streets could not? Our nation is focused on how rescue workers will communicate during a recovery effort, and how wireless phone users will be located when placing 911 calls.

The wireless industry faces a list of challenges. Another one to add to the list is: should emergency workers have Priority Access Service (PAS) over consumers making 911 cell phone calls during an emergency?

While it is absolutely imperative that emergency workers have access to networks, it's equally important that consumers have access to report emergencies. When e911 is implemented in all markets, this problem could be eliminated. In the meantime, the federal government is requesting the wireless industry institute a plan for PAS.

Cellular towers have a fixed number of telephone lines. When they are full, callers are put in a 'holding pattern' and get through on a first-come, first-serve basis. With PAS, officials with special access codes, will leap-frog over consumers waiting to place emergency calls or bump calls to gain access.

Wireless companies were first asked to devise a plan of action for PAS in 1995. As we saw on September 11th, little has been done. Last year, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) asked carriers to provide priority access to emergency personnel on a volunteer basis. Carriers have not done so. Companies cite technological difficulties, shortage of spectrum, different and conflicting standards used in the US, and the difficulty in locating cell phone calls when they bounce from station to station.

I wouldn't be able to place an emergency call from my cell phone, if I am in a crisis area? Not acceptable. Many consumers, carry a cell phone for emergency purposes.

Share and Share Alike

Published on Wireless Design & Development (<http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com>)

What's the point of paying to have that security, if it can't be used?

October 1, 2001 was the FCC's original deadline to implement Phase II of e911.

Nearly all wireless companies applied for deadline waivers stating that the technology necessary to meet FCC requirements is not available. Graciously, the FCC granted extensions, with the final deadline set for December 2005. What are we supposed to do in the meantime? Meeting these requirements would help to solve the PAS debate.

The wireless industry is working diligently on a PAS solution and wireless carriers have agreed to an interim system for 500 officials, and will begin work on a larger system that will support 50,000 users by the end of next year.

Supporters for providing PAS to emergency officials say that saving lives during disasters takes precedence over calls made by the public. No one debates the importance of having every venue available for rescue personnel to save lives. However, if 911 via cell phone is limited, or the public is cut off entirely, emergency workers will lack valuable information that could save even more lives. The wireless industry must work together to create a balance that will allow emergency officials and the public to access wireless networks at the same time during a crisis.

Source URL (retrieved on 12/20/2014 - 12:57pm):

http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com/product-releases/2001/10/share-and-share-alike?qt-digital_editions=0