

**For immediate release
September 21, 2016**

**SPECIALIZED 9-1-1 TEXT SERVICE FOR DEAF AND SPEECH-IMPAIRED NOW
AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT THE SQUAMISH-LILLOOET REGIONAL DISTRICT AND B.C.'S
CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN INTERIOR**

Today, the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) along with eight other regional districts in the Central and Southern Interiors of B.C. announced the availability of a specialized text service that allows people who are Deaf/Deaf-Blind, Hard-of-Hearing or Speech Impaired (DHHSI) to communicate with 9-1-1 call-takers by text.

The service is called Text with 9-1-1 (T9-1-1) and is being delivered by E-Comm—the emergency communications centre responsible for answering 9-1-1 calls in the SLRD and central and southern interiors—in partnership with local emergency service agencies. The service, which has been available in the southern SLRD (Electoral Areas C & D, Pemberton, Squamish and Whistler) and throughout the Lower Mainland since 2014, is now available in the northern SLRD (Electoral Areas A, B, Lillooet), as well as throughout the Central Okanagan, North Okanagan, Central Kootenay, Columbia-Shuswap, Okanagan-Similkameen, Thompson-Nicola, East Kootenay and Kootenay-Boundary regional districts.

“T9-1-1 is a vital connection to police, fire and ambulance and enables quick communication between a Deaf caller and emergency services,” remarked Gordon Rattray, Treasurer of the Okanagan Valley Association of the Deaf (OVAD). “In the past Deaf people were limited by communication barriers and would have to use phone relay or TTY (telephone typewriter) which would take five or ten minutes longer. The OVAD is very excited to have T9-1-1 in the interior regional districts and we look forward to helping promote the availability of this service with the DHHSI community. We’re proud of this enhancement to emergency services that E-Comm provides.”

T9-1-1 allows any DHHSI person who has pre-registered their cellphone with their wireless carrier to communicate with police, fire and ambulance call-takers via text during an emergency. Callers must first place a voice call to 9-1-1 on their registered cellphone in order to establish a voice network connection and initiate the special messaging technology. A cellular connection is required for T9-1-1 service.

“Ensuring safety and access to critical emergency services for all SLRD residents is paramount, and we’re very happy that the T9-1-1 service is now available throughout the Regional District, wherever there is cellular service,” says Jack Crompton, SLRD Board Chair. “We know that the

T9-1-1 service will have a positive impact in our communities, and I encourage residents with hearing or speech impairments to register for the service and learn how to use it.”

When E-Comm receives a 9-1-1 call from a DHHSI person who has pre-registered for the service, an alert will trigger at the 9-1-1 centre to indicate there is a DHHSI caller on the line. The 9-1-1 call-taker will then launch the special messaging system, allowing them to communicate with the caller through a special text session. This will ensure they get the emergency service they need.

“Being able to communicate with 9-1-1 using this technology allows for greater access to important 9-1-1 lifelines in the event of an emergency,” added David Guscott, E-Comm President and CEO. “E-Comm is proud to be able to offer this enhanced level of service to our partners in the central and southern interiors of B.C.”

It is important to emphasize that this service is only available to the DHHSI community. Voice calling remains the only way to communicate with 9-1-1 services for a person who is not Deaf/Deaf-Blind, Hard-of-Hearing or Speech Impaired. Text messages sent directly to the digits “9-1-1” do not reach emergency services anywhere in Canada. Text with 9-1-1 for the public-at-large is anticipated in the future as the nationwide 9-1-1 infrastructure evolves.

Members of the DHHSI community should visit www.TextWith911.ca to register their cellphone with their wireless service provider and to learn *more about how the system works*.

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E-Comm is the largest 9-1-1 call centre in British Columbia and handles approximately 1.35 million emergency calls per year for Metro Vancouver and 24 other regional districts and communities spanning from Vancouver Island to Alberta and from the U.S. border, to north of Prince George. E-Comm also provides call-taking and dispatch services to 35 police and fire departments and operates the largest multi-jurisdictional, tri-service emergency radio system in the province.

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