

What is E-Comm?

E-Comm's legal name is Emergency Communications for British Columbia Incorporated. E-Comm operates two 9-1-1 call centres: Lower Mainland (largest in B.C.) and Vancouver Island. It provides dispatch services for more than 70 police agencies and fire departments in B.C. E-Comm also owns and operates the wide-area radio network used by police, fire and ambulance personnel throughout Metro Vancouver and parts of the Fraser Valley.

Which areas does E-Comm provide service for?

E-Comm is the 9-1-1 Primary Public Safety Answer Point (PSAP)—the first point of contact for 9-1-1 callers—for 25 regional districts in British Columbia spanning from Vancouver Island to Alberta and from the U.S. border to north of Prince George:

- Alberni-Clayoquot
- Bulkley-Nechako
- Capital
- Cariboo
- Central Kootenay (excludes Nelson)
- Central Okanagan
- Columbia-Shuswap
- Comox Valley
- Cowichan
- East Kootenay
- Fraser-Fort George
- Fraser Valley
- Kitimat-Stikine
- Kootenay-Boundary
- Metro Vancouver
- Mount Waddington
- Nanaimo
- North Okanagan
- Okanagan-Similkameen
- Peace River
- qathet (Powell River)
- Squamish-Lillooet
- Strathcona
- Sunshine Coast Regional District
- Thompson-Nicola

How is 9-1-1 funded?

9-1-1 service is contracted to E-Comm by the regional districts/communities that use E-Comm as their PSAP. Most regional districts/communities fund 9-1-1 through property taxes, however some use other methods such as call-answer levies.

How many 9-1-1 calls are received daily?

On average, E-Comm is responsible for about 5,700 9-1-1 calls per day. E-Comm's annual call volume is more than 2 million.

How does 9-1-1 work?

When a caller dials 9-1-1, the E-Comm call taker answers by asking, “Do you need police, fire, or ambulance?” The call taker will also confirm in which municipality emergency response is required before connecting the caller as quickly as possible to the dispatch agency requested. The E-Comm call taker will remain on the line with the caller until the dispatch agency answers, with the entire process typically taking less than a minute. Some of these agencies are located in the E-Comm facility, others are not. Visit ecomm911.ca for a listing of our dispatch partners.

What if a caller doesn't know which service they need?

If a caller is unsure which service they need, the E-Comm 9-1-1 call taker is trained to ask a few quick questions to help determine the appropriate agency. Once connected to the appropriate dispatch agency, their call taker can also contact other agencies for assistance. For example, if the ambulance service (BC Emergency Health Services) receives a call where police presence is required, they will contact the appropriate department/detachment for assistance.

What is the difference between a call taker and dispatcher?

A call taker speaks with the person who has dialed 9-1-1 and a dispatcher speaks with the emergency personnel in the field. In some cases, the dispatcher will speak to the caller as well. The call taker and dispatcher work together, using computer and radio systems to share information instantly and seamlessly.



Do E-Comm call takers/dispatchers see my phone number and address if I dial 9-1-1?

If you dial 9-1-1 from a traditional landline, E-Comm's computer system will display the name, phone number, and address associated with the phone that you have dialed from. This information is provided by the telephone company. The call taker will confirm the location information with you. In the case of a business with offices located at multiple sites or locations, the main switchboard number may be displayed based on head office information. Dedicated phone lines for outbound 9-1-1 calls for individual office locations can be arranged with your service provider or through a service called Private Switch Automatic Location Information (PSALI) which allows businesses to maintain accurate location information.

If you dial 9-1-1 from a cellphone, the call taker will see your phone number, the name of your wireless provider and latitude/longitude coordinates that indicate your general location. Current technology cannot pinpoint your exact location. This is why it's so important that you know your location at all times.

If you are using a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone service, VoIP calls to 9-1-1 do not go directly to 9-1-1 centres. If you dial 9-1-1 from a VoIP phone, your call will go to a third-party call centre and an operator will re-direct your call to the appropriate 9-1-1 centre. VoIP phones do not provide location information and it is crucial that your location information is up to date with your VoIP service provider as the operator may assume that you are at the last registered address if you are not able to speak during a 9-1-1 call.

Does E-Comm receive unnecessary 9-1-1 calls?

E-Comm receives accidental 9-1-1 calls each day, due in large part to cellphones being left in a position where keys can be accidentally pressed, preprogramming 9-1-1 into phones and automatic dials. Never program 9-1-1 into any phone, and always stow your cellphone carefully to help prevent accidental calls.

It's most important for callers to know that 9-1-1 is for emergencies only—it's not an information line. During a major disaster or event, residents should turn to official government sources or media channels, not 9-1-1, to get up-to-date information. The 9-1-1 system is designed for individual emergencies and in the event of a major disaster, there is a possibility telephone service will be impacted. British Columbians should prepare themselves for this by having a preparedness plan. Visit gov.bc.ca/PreparedBC for more information.

What happens if I dial 9-1-1 accidentally?

The most important thing to do is stay on the line. If you hang up, then our call takers have to take the time to call you back to confirm you are okay, further tying up emergency lines. In circumstances where your location is known, police will be sent to check on you. If you dial us by mistake, you will not be charged a fee, so there is no need to be concerned.

What if English is my second language?

E-Comm has access to a 24-hour interpretation service for more than 170 languages that we can connect to in less than a minute. If you have friends or family members whose first language is not English, the most helpful thing you can do is teach them the English word for the language they do speak (e.g. learn to say "Cantonese") to help speed up the process. Learning how to say "police, fire, ambulance" is also helpful, as is knowing addresses.


Special Services

In E-Comm's service area, there is a special service for the Deaf/Deaf-Blind, Hard-of-Hearing, and Speech Impaired (DHHSI) that allows DHHSI persons to communicate with a 9-1-1 operator through a special text system. This system is called Text with 9-1-1 (T9-1-1) and means any DHHSI person who has pre-registered their cellphone for the service and is calling from an area where the service is available, is able to communicate with police, fire and ambulance call takers via text in case of emergency.

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.

For more information or to register for Text with 9-1-1 visit textwith911.ca.

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