



NENA Comments - 9-1-1 Institute Congressional Briefing

June 24, 2004

Good afternoon, my name is Roger Hixson and I'm the Technical Issues Director of the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), the primary Public Safety organization actively developing the requirements and definitions needed to establish the transition of today's Enhanced 9-1-1 systems and services into the needs of the future. It should not be big news that today's E9-1-1 process is outdated and overburdened. The system is inadequate for present needs and much less those of the near and more distant future. And yet, that same system is what the vast majority of the nation's public safety personnel depend on every hour and minute of every day for communication with those desperately needing emergency assistance. These same public safety professionals do a consistent and admirable job for the public and the nation, in spite of the current system's limitations.

In the last 15 years, modern communications service advancements in wireless and now Voice Internet Protocol have put a spotlight on the need for a more appropriate E9-1-1. A 9-1-1 system that is able to adapt rapidly to new technology and the resulting new devices supporting communications.

NENA views that 9-1-1 calls or emergency messaging can and should be handled by any communications capable device, from anywhere, at any time. As a result, the systems handling these calls and messages have to be able to adapt quickly – have 'plug-and-play' capabilities, use mainstream technology, off the shelf components, and equally importantly, be established and managed under forward looking rules and regulations. All too often, today's 9-1-1 process runs up against rules that were designed for local and toll telephone processes, but are inappropriate for the more specialized and critical nature of E9-1-1.

NENA's 9-1-1 Future Path Plan, more than two years old now, was developed to describe the characteristics of, and targets for a new 21st Century E9-1-1. Voice over IP is the first challenge and opportunity to apply a specific technology to solutions that meet that Future Path Plan. Last year NENA formed both Technical and 9-1-1 Center Operations committees, made up of a wide range of interested parties, including people central to the international Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), to pursue this challenge / opportunity. The work done to date on both interim/transitional and long-term solutions has put us in position to define full requirements on or about the end of 2004.

We now fully expect that an end-to-end, IP-based E9-1-1 will be the preferred course. Already this effort has positively affected plans by commercial vendors on interim ways to bring Voice over Internet and other VoIP 9-1-1 calling sources into the E9-1-1 process, and has provided a large basis for the recently initiated FCC NRIC VII attempt to define future E9-1-1 'engineering'. All of this is critical to the future of IP and E9-1-1 among

both traditional carriers and the growing group of non-traditional service providers.

Now that we have a good look at probable solutions, specific NENA work on related IP E9-1-1 enabling issues will start in July. These include 9-1-1 funding replacement methods, funding of the development and implementation of an evolutionary E9-1-1, public education, the education of Public Safety personnel, targeted regulation for VoIP as it relates to E9-1-1 and Public Safety, transitional strategies, and other areas. All of these parallel enabling factors are necessary to a successful national `project` to replace today's limited E9-1-1 with one adequate to cope with rapid technological change and future needs.

You probably caught the term `targeted regulation`. NENA views that cooperative efforts, within reasonable timeframes, to define specific but `light touch` regulations for VoIP and E9-1-1 are likely to generate faster, better results than forced, contentious methods. Wireless E9-1-1 might be considered an object lesson on this point. The NENA-VON Coalition agreement is an early indicator of public safety and VoIP industry cooperative action. Definition of regulatory approaches needs to be quickly accomplished, however, in the view of many in the Public Safety community who are confronted with loss of service fee funding as their traditional sources of operational funds deteriorate, even as the demands on their resources become greater. In the design of these new, forward looking systems and services, we must be careful to not put roadblocks, either technical or regulatory, in the way of Public Safety personnel and their performance of life affecting services to the public. Future policies encompassing 9-1-1 must be crafted to advance the goal of universal E9-1-1 for all communications devices and technologies. We see a national coordinating office as drafted in pending E9-1-1 legislation helping with that.

I need to point out another clarification. We are not talking about an E9-1-1 emergency services network based exclusively on the general Internet. VoIP and IP relate to a protocol supporting combined digital voice and data communication. We view that, while some sources of calls and emergency messaging will necessarily initiate on the Internet, private managed IP networks will be the mechanism for delivery to the Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), which number over 6000 in the U.S. Similarly, such private managed IP-based networks will likely be the method of choice for emergency communications between the PSAPs and many other entities providing various forms of emergency services and support.

Accomplishing all of these needs, a huge effort on the whole, demands a convergence of efforts among all primary parties. Technological change is rapid and accelerating, and cannot be held back. Emphasis should be on cooperative actions to meet carefully defined, real needs, in the interests of the earliest possible full solutions for all the factors mentioned. The continued safety of our citizens, and our national security, is dependent on our actions.

Thank you for your time. Copies of my remarks, our recent testimony to the Senate Commerce Committee, our comments to the FCC VoIP NPRM, and other policy and information on NENA's IP concerns and activities are available on the NENA website, www.nena.org.