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9-1-1 Access on VoIP Greatly Advances Public Safety

Washington, D.C.—The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) today directed providers of IP-based communications services, commonly known as “Voice over Internet Protocol” or “VoIP” to begin providing their customers with access to 9-1-1 and E9-1-1 services. The FCC requirement will go into effect within 120 days.

“Today’s action by the FCC marks a tremendous advancement for public safety and will provide consumers and first responders with some assurance that VoIP services will be able to connect to 9-1-1,” said Gregory L. Rohde, Executive Director of the E9-1-1 Institute. “Consumers, as well as the VoIP industry, need this kind of regulatory certainty. The FCC heard the calls from recent tragedies where precious lives were lost because 9-1-1 was not available on VoIP service in certain circumstances. Starting today, the FCC is making 9-1-1 and E9-1-1 access a mandatory feature, not an optional one” Rohde said.

Under the FCC order, all VoIP providers will have to deliver 9-1-1 calls to a local PSAP and in cases where the PSAP is capable of receiving E9-1-1, VoIP providers will be required to provide the call back number and location information of the caller. In addition, VoIP providers will be required to inform their customers about the E9-1-1 capabilities and limitations of their service.

On Tuesday, May 24, 2005, the E9-1-1 Institute will host a policy roundtable on Capitol Hill that will further examine the FCC’s actions as well as discuss legislation that was recently introduced in the U.S. Congress, HR 2418 sponsored by Representative Bart Gordon (D-TN), Representative John Shimkus (R-IL), and Representative Anna Eshoo (D-CA) and S. 1063 sponsored by Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL), Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT), and Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY). In addition, the roundtable will feature a keynote address by Chris Seidl of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) which imposed a similar 9-1-1 access requirement on VoIP providers in Canada last month. Other panelists will include representatives from BellSouth, Intrado, TCS, and Vonage. The roundtable will start at 12:00 pm and will be held in Senate Dirksen Building in room 124.

Rohde said: “I commend the leadership of Chairman Kevin Martin and his fellow Commissioners for acting on this matter. VoIP services are growing at a rapid pace. Consumers need to know that they can call 9-1-1 regardless of the phone they reach for in an emergency. Further, I believe that the industry needs clear rules and the Commission has acted wisely to address both the needs of consumers and industry today.”

About the E911 Institute. The E9-1-1 Institute (www.e911institute.org) is a not-for-profit organization which provides administrative and policy support to the Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus. The purpose of the E9-1-1 Institute is to promote public education and awareness of E9-1-1 and emergency communications issues and serve the Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus as a clearinghouse of information on E9-1-1 and emergency communications issues. Gregory L. Rohde, former Administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, serves as the E9-1-1 Institute’s Executive Director.

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