

Text First. Talk Second.

The September 11, 2001 terror attacks, Hurricane Katrina and the 2011 East Coast earthquake all share something in common – each caused massive mobile phone service disruption for millions of Americans.

Mobile call volume simply overwhelmed provider capacity during these incidents.

The desire to call loved ones after an emergency or disaster is natural. However, preparedness experts universally agree that during an emergency and its immediate aftermath, communicating via SMS text messaging should be your first choice.

40% of cell owners said they found themselves in an *emergency situation* in which having their phone with them helped

This is because non-essential calls often shutdown wireless phone service and prevent 911 calls from getting through and emergency personnel being unable to communicate with each other. In fact, just a single one-minute phone call takes up the same bandwidth as 800 short SMS text messages.

Also, unlike phone calls, text messages get through even when the network is congested. Even if it gets a "busy signal" on its first try the text system will continue to keep trying to deliver your message. This makes text messaging perfect for sending non-emergency messages like "R U OK" and "I M OK."

Below are some FAQs:

Why do I need to use a short code?

Research by the University of Missouri has shown that 800 short text messages consume the same mobile phone bandwidth as one one minute phone call. Short text messages help ease bandwidth demand on mobile communication systems and allow those in need of immediate help to get through to first responders.

What do I do if I am not okay and need help?

Calling 911 should always be your first choice when you are in need of emergency help. Texting is most valuable for non-emergency communication with friends, family and others.

Can I text to 911?

Not yet, wireless companies, like Verizon, are working on enhancing their technology to enable the ability to text messages to 911. Currently, this technology is only in the testing phase. It is anticipated that the text to 911 capabilities will begin to rollout in the United States towards the end of 2014.

What do I do if someone texts me they are in need of help?

It is okay to use voice networks when those you care about are in need of help; so, try calling them first. If you cannot connect with them via a call, but can still text with them: First, find out their exact location; second, try and identify their problem (i.e. "I'm stuck in the house"); third, contact the State Patrol in the state where the person in need is located. Additionally, use your family communications plan to contact someone located in close proximity to your loved one/friend and see if they can render immediate assistance. You can download a Safe America family communications plan [here](#).

What do I do if texting doesn't work?

If you have a smartphone and a data plan, you might still be able to communicate via the internet through programs like Skype or Facetime. You can also use email and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to let people know your safety status. Alternatively, businesses that offers wifi, like coffee shops, are also potential options for getting a message out when other forms of communications are down. However, please keep in mind that communicating via the internet can be the least ideal communications option due to higher bandwidth demand and lack of availability power outage situation.

Can I text if I don't have a smartphone?

Yes, almost all current mobile phones offer users the ability to send and receive text messages. However, text messaging is not a free option on most plans. Check with your service provider to determine your plan's texting options. For information on how to text visit our [texting guide page](#).

For more information, visit [Safe America Foundation](#).