

PSC SAFETY ALERT

911 EMERGENCIES ON SATELLITE PHONES

Recently a serious accident occurred on a remote drilling location in Alberta. The company's on site consultant involved used the latest technology; his satellite phone to call 9-1-1. The operator who answered knew nothing about their location or how to find them in order to send assistance. How could she, she was in the 9-1-1 emergency response center in Toronto, Ontario.

How could something like this happen? It was explained to the PSC this way. All landline 9-1-1 calls are routed to the appropriate 9-1-1 call centre based on the physical location of the landline. Cell phone calls are routed based on the wireless service provider's interconnection point to the public switched telephone network not the wireless caller's physical location. 9-1-1 calls placed on a satellite network are routed based on the satellite service provider's network and where their network interconnects with the public switched telephone network, in this case Toronto. It could have gone to almost any city in North America. The local telephone system would then identify it as an emergency call and link it to the nearest emergency response center. These centers are not linked to each other and most likely would not even know where to transfer the call if asked to direct it back to Alberta or anywhere else.

A number of important lessons can be learned by all of us from this incident.

1. Ensure we have a complete Emergency Response Plan (ERP) established for our organization.
2. Train all personnel to implement the plan through education and practice.
3. Upon arrival, test the system to ensure phones; phone numbers and other contacts work from that location.
4. Develop a checklist for emergency calls, including preliminary questions to ensure the center reached can respond to your emergency.
5. Have backup and contingency plans that are tested during practice drills.

The importance of practice, drills and checklists cannot be over emphasized. All employees must know and be familiar with all aspects of the ERP. They must know their own and each other's responsibilities in order to ensure the emergency is dealt with effectively. A phone checklist will be helpful to the individual assigned to make calls, but it will be invaluable to an 'alternate' who has to call for an ambulance if the injured worker is the person who was assigned to do the phoning in the ERP.

The accident that brought this problem to light was a fatality. The confusion with the 911 System **did not** contribute to the severity in this instance. However, had the accident resulted in serious injury with response time being of prime importance, the communications problems could have been disastrous.

If you plan to use a Satellite Service Provider ask if they provide an emergency response service for directing 9-1-1 dialed calls to appropriate emergency centers for the satellite caller's physical location. If it is not available make other arrangements to ensure that proper assistance is just a phone call away.

CONTACT:

Canadian Petroleum Safety Council
Phone: (403) 509-4871
Email: info@psc.ca

This material is presented for information purposes only. Managers & supervisors should evaluate this information to determine if it can be applied to their own situations and practices.