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# Next-gen 911 progress lagging, FCC panel says

Despite recent progress, major challenges remain for emergency network  
By Brad Reed , Network World , 02/07/2008

America's next-generation [911 system](#) is "woefully behind" where it needs to be in order to keep up with the deployment of mobile broadband technology, according to speakers at a panel discussion sponsored by the [FCC](#).

Next-generation 911 is an initiative meant to expand the types of mobile communications that can be received by emergency service providers by equipping Public Safety Access Points (PSAP) with IP connectivity. This way, a person in an emergency situation could contact emergency service providers through traditional voice calls, text messaging or even [mobile](#) video. But despite the rapid development of mobile [broadband](#) technology in recent years, panelists at the FCC's summit on 911 call center operations Wednesday said that next-generation 911 is not where it should be relative to current technological capabilities.

"We're unfortunately woefully behind, which leaves us ill-prepared for the next mass-casualty event such as a Hurricane Katrina," said Jim Kohlenberger, the executive director of the Voice on the Net ([VON](#)) coalition. "If we're able to connect every school and library to an IP network, we should be able to do the same for every PSAP."

Fellow panelist Roger Hixson, technical issues director at the 911 National Emergency Number Association ([NENA](#)), said several factors have slowed next-generation 911, but the most crucial factor is the lack of national urgency in getting next-generation 911 up and running.

"If we had the same attitude today about [next-generation 911] that we had in the '60s about putting a man on the moon, we could have this project done by the end of the decade," he said. "But we don't have that organized approach yet in this country regarding next-gen 911."

Hixson said the next-generation 911 system would eventually need a standardized interface that would allow companies in the commercial sphere to design devices specifically to meet the interface requirements. He also said there needs to be more education of lawmakers explaining why the next-generation 911 project is so important to America's future national security.

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Paul Delorimiere, the executive director of emergency communications for [Verizon](#), said another challenge for the project is building out a secure transition [LAN](#) for emergency services that would not have a negative impact on wireless and wireline [VoIP](#) services.

"Sometimes we look at next-generation technology as a state of nirvana or an endgame that we all want to get to," he said. "But we've got to make sure that as we transition, we continue to provide the service that America deserves."

While many panelists emphasized what they considered to be slow progress in developing the next-generation 911 system, panelist Laurie Flaherty, a program analyst at the office of EMS at U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), said it was unrealistic to expect a next-generation emergency network could be built as quickly in the public sector as it could in the private sector. Even so, she acknowledged there are several issues that need to be addressed before the next-generation 911 system becomes a reality, including [security](#), location accuracy and non-technical governance issues over how the system should be used. Resolving these issues quickly, the panelists agreed, would be necessary in order to upgrade the nation's emergency services to meet the demands of mobile broadband technology.

"The Internet has gotten way out ahead of 911," said Marty Feurstein, who is a CTO at wireless location technology company [Polaris Wireless](#) and who watched the panel discussion as a spectator. "A lot of people think they can contact public safety services by using [SMS](#), when in reality they can't."

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