

Wireless E 9-1-1 Per-Call Rate Possibilities – Good or Bad? Where does it stand?

There has recently been a flurry of discussions about the potential for wireless E 9-1-1 rates from the 9-1-1 Service System Providers. This message is an attempt to provide some facts about where this issue stands, as of May 2002.

Several of the major LECs that act as 9-1-1 service system providers (SSPs) were contacted. Overall, none of the companies listed below has finalized or filed for any 9-1-1 rates using a per-call approach. All of them may be considering such a structure, some basically because the others are:

ALLTEL – will be considering it, has done no specific work yet

BellSouth – has done evaluation of this and alternatives. Evaluating 9-1-1 changes for wireless, looking at cost studies. Haven't settled on per-call rate yet.

Qwest – the PUC from one of their supported states has requested that they consider a per-call rate plan. Qwest is not actively considering the per-call rate option.

SBC – definitely considering per-call rate as more appropriate for the wireless services than historical rate approaches. Preference is a tariff approach, but contract rates not ruled out. Considering both a direct per-call rate, and a 'budget' plan where there could be constant monthly payments, then a true-up at year end, in order to support customers who need a specific monthly rate for budget purposes. Currently thought that tandem-to-tandem capabilities and any added SR- PSAP trunking would be included in the per-call rate. A range of 20-30 cents per call has been discussed with some customers.

Sprint – evaluating choices, and no specific decisions made yet

Verizon – exploring all choices. No set charging plan decided on.

Per-Call Good or Bad?

The answer to this question is far from clear cut. A per-call rate would presumably cause costs to Public Safety entities that are more proportional to their actual level of call activity – the low volume PSAP would pay less than a high call volume PSAP. The appropriateness of a per-call rate may depend on a number of issues:

- is a per-call rate more appropriate for wireless 9-1-1 call and data transport functions, as compared to fixed price for the storage-based data processes in the wireline 9-1-1 environment?
- would a per-call rate apply just for wireless calling, or for all 9-1-1 services?
- what costs are included, which aren't?
- is there a separate non-recurring fee, and what does it include?
- validation that only new costs associated with wireless are included
- is there a better option (a rate based on per cell site, per subscriber, per MSC 9-1-1 trunk, per PSAP 9-1-1 trunk), and is the information for this option available to the LEC to

control billing?

Until information to answer questions such as these is available, there may be no valid way to evaluate alternative ways to recover the costs of the 9-1-1 service system provider. It is not clear that per-call rates are an obviously bad choice – but certainly more information is needed to determine whether they are a good or bad choice.