

# BRAZOS VALLEY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS, TEXAS

## IMPLEMENTING TEXT-TO-9-1-1: THINKING AHEAD AND TRAINING UP

**ANITA PITT**, BVCOG 9-1-1 PROGRAM MANAGER

The Brazos Valley region of East Texas is home to approximately 315,000 people within 5,109 square miles in the counties of Brazos, Burtleson, Robertson, Grimes, Leon, Madison and Washington. As the Brazos Valley Council of Governments (BVCOG), which oversees and manages Public Safety communications for the region, moved toward the next generation of Public Safety, it looked to bring Text-to-9-1-1 to its communities. Importantly for BVCOG, the added Text-to-9-1-1 functionality needed to integrate seamlessly with Calltakers' workflows and processes. Only one solution fit the bill – Airbus DS Communications' **VESTA® SMS**, the company's 9-1-1 solution with a fully integrated text-to-9-1-1 application.

“We were not interested in implementing other solutions such as the web based browser solution or text to TTY. We wanted something that would fully integrate into our existing 9-1-1 call taking system,” said **Anita Pitt, BVCOG 9-1-1 program manager**. “With VESTA® SMS, text messages are answered via our existing 9-1-1 equipment in almost the same way as a voice call. And the interface makes responding to 9-1-1 text calls almost as easy as texting on your phone.”

On June 16, 2015, implementation of VESTA SMS was complete in Washington, Grimes and Burtleson counties as well as the City of Navasota in Grimes County. With this, BVCOG became the first agency in the U.S. to complete a native Text-to-9-1-1 call. The region's remaining counties of Leon, Madison

and Robertson will begin implementation in 2016, bringing Text-to-9-1-1 to the more than 126,000 citizens of Brazos Valley.

### PLANNING AHEAD

Getting to that stage, though, took some time including numerous late nights, and a lot of coordination and cooperation between multiple providers. Together, this work moved BVCOG from discussion and planning to the end result of receiving the first native 9-1-1 SMS call in the nation.

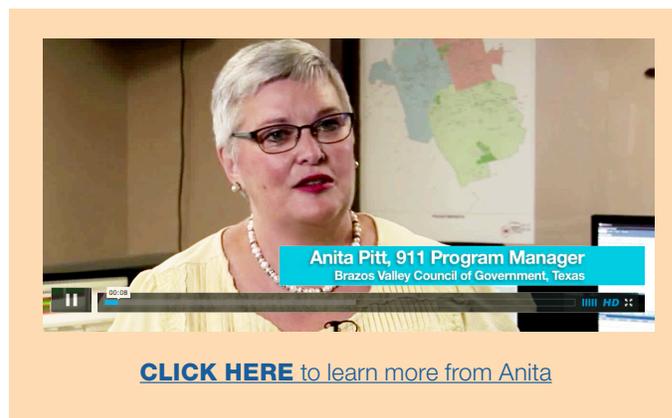
As BVCOG discovered, a number of critical decisions need to be made early in the planning process. Text-to-9-1-1 relies on multiple outside agencies, some of which have significant lead times when starting service or requesting equipment. This could lead to delays if there isn't careful planning and coordination, including:

- **Request Text-to-9-1-1 Service** – The 9-1-1 governing authority must first notify the Commercial Mobile Radio Service providers that the PSAP is ready to receive text-to-9-1-1 messages. The recommended approach is for the PSAP to complete the Text-to-911 Readiness and Certification Form found on the FCC site at <https://www.fcc.gov/general/psap-text-911-readiness-and-certification-form>. When the governing authority sends this form to the FCC, the FCC then provides notice to the Carriers of the PSAPs' readiness. Wireless carriers are allowed six months from the date of request to begin implementing text functionality.

- **Selecting the TCC** – Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) must decide which Text Control Center (TCC) provider to use—the critical link that ensures a text sent to a cellular provider’s network is routed to the appropriate 9-1-1 call center. This decision could be driven based on price, existing relationships or company preference. PSAPs should be aware that TCC providers may have lead times of 2-3 months to establish service and may have testing requirements that will need to be built into timelines.
- **Network Design** – PSAPs should understand how the 9-1-1 equipment will connect to the TCC and if new equipment will be required based on TCC selection, existing infrastructure or customer preference. Network design review meetings with appropriate parties should be held early in the planning process to ensure all aspects of the design are reviewed and approved prior to implementation.
- **Circuit Orders** – PSAPs may need to order new circuits from their network provider for connection to the TCC in order to handle text messages. Obtaining these circuits can take 45 to 60 days, with additional time needed for implementation.
- **Routing Policies** – Text-to-9-1-1 is an initial step into the true next-generation PSAP environment, and new routing policies need to be established. For instance, if a PSAP is unable to answer a 9-1-1 text message call due to timing or staffing, or if the PSAP is offline, where does that message route? What happens with that message? How is it handled? These decisions need to be made prior to final implementation.

### EXAMPLE OF ROUTING POLICY

Early on, the BVCOG team implemented several new routing policies by designating a nearby agency, Washington County 9-1-1, to provide support if the local PSAP is unable to answer Text-to-9-1-1 calls. For example, calls will automatically be rerouted to Washington County 9-1-1 if BVCOG is unmanned due to evacuation or a text message has been waiting in queue for more than two minutes. If those and similar events occur while Washington County 9-1-1 is also unable to respond, a reject notification will be sent by the TCC so the caller knows to call by phone.



### DESIGN, TEST AND TRAIN

The key to BVCOG’s successful beta tests and later full implementation was that the system was designed and tested with Calltakers in mind. Although some Calltakers were initially concerned about the new actions and processes required to answer text calls, they were pleasantly surprised how seamless the integration is with their regular activities and workflow.

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“It’s been an easy transition with VESTA SMS,” added Anita. “The system makes answering Text-to-9-1-1 calls so seamless and unobtrusive that it’s now just another natural way to communicate.”

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Another integral part of BVCOG’s implementation was the testing and training provided in preparation of implementing VESTA SMS. Some best practices include:

- **Educate Calltakers** – Provide education to Calltakers on clear operational procedures and the overall importance of Text-to-9-1-1.
- **Prepare for testing** – It’s important to send test messages on each mobile provider’s networks, which requires securing phones from each provider. Involving Calltakers in this early process can begin to build familiarity and confidence in the system.
- **Simulated training** – As soon as possible, begin training Calltakers in a simulated environment to build familiarity and confidence as well as identify procedures and future training that should be refined.

- **Planned announcements** – Do not publicly announce the go-live-date for Text-to-9-1-1. Calls for help via text will occur even without a public announcement, so waiting allows time for live training before receiving calls from the public en masse.
- **Clear public communication** – Once the time comes to announce to the public-at-large that Text-to-9-1-1 is available in the area, it is vital that communication focus on education. Text-to-9-1-1 is new to everyone and citizens are just as much a partner to the Calltakers as the other way around. NENA has a trove of [Text-to-9-1-1 Resources for PSAPs and 9-1-1 Authorities](#) that contains information related to SMS readiness, training and public education.

In all, the move to Text-to-9-1-1 must be methodical with every step, test and roll out carefully considered. Consulting with those who have done it before can provide invaluable insights as can selecting the right partners.

The work Anita and her team, accomplished along with the TCCs and service providers, paved the way for PSAPs across the U.S. to make it easier for them to realize the benefits to integrated SMS. Anita's "lessons learned" deliver value to the Public Safety industry as it takes the next steps forward to full Next Generation 9-1-1 implementation.

### About the VESTA® Solution

The VESTA 9-1-1 Next Generation call handling solution integrates VESTA SMS, text-to 9-1-1 functionality, into its operating system. VESTA® 9-1-1 and VESTA SMS are compliant with the National Emergency Number Association's (NENA) i3 standard, the Joint Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS), and the Telecommunications Industry Association's (TIA) J-STD-110 specifications. The solutions support connections via the Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet) or through dedicated, redundant IP circuits to a text control center.

The Brazos Valley Council of Governments was among the first to deploy the VESTA SMS application, and was the first Public Safety agency in the nation to deliver a native text-to-9-1-1 message through call answering equipment, not a third party texting or messaging application.

### YOUR TRUSTED PARTNER

Your community trusts you to protect them, and that means more than just using the right equipment. It means having a trusted partner in Public Safety communications. That partner is Airbus DS Communications, where your **CRITICAL MATTERS®**.

As the world's largest and most reliable source for Next Generation 9-1-1, Land Mobile Radio and Emergency Notification, we keep people connected when it matters most. For over four decades, Airbus DS Communications has designed solutions with an open mind, creating smarter ways to keep all our communities safe. Today we support more than 60% of all U.S. Public Safety Answering Points, serving over 200 million people, along with hundreds of private sector businesses in 20+ different industries, including transportation, utilities and healthcare, and Federal and DoD operations globally.

To learn more, call **951.719.2100** or visit us online at **[www.Airbus-DSComm.com](http://www.Airbus-DSComm.com)**.

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