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Iowa completes first phase of 9-1-1 upgrade project

DES MOINES – The Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division (HSEMD) recently completed the first phase of a project that will improve the public's access to 9-1-1 through the use of leading-edge technology.

HSEMD, which oversees the state's wireless 9-1-1 system, recently completed an upgrade to Iowa's wireless 9-1-1 network that will eventually allow citizens to use texting, video and picture messaging to access emergency care. Iowa is one of the first states in the nation to complete a statewide upgrade of its wireless 9-1-1 network to an Internet Protocol (IP)-based system, which is more robust and capable of handling text messaging, video messaging and photos.

"Now that we have installed this new network, we expect it will take approximately two years for the state's public safety answering points to get their call-taking equipment upgraded and for wireless service providers to be ready to utilize this technology," said HSEMD's Barbara Vos, State 9-1-1 Program manager. Vos said once the public safety answering points and wireless carriers have finished their upgrades, Iowans will be able to fully use this technology to reach out to 9-1-1.

"While the existing 9-1-1 system has been a success story for more than 30 years, it has been stretched to its limit," said HSEMD Administrator Mark Schouten. "A great many Iowans use communication devices that offer text, video and picture messaging capabilities and we must be able to utilize this technology as a tool to increase the safety of our citizens."

The upgrade of the state's 9-1-1 system to an IP-based network is part of a national initiative called Next Generation 911 (NG9-1-1). The NG9-1-1 initiative is being led by the U.S. Department of Transportation to ensure the nation's public safety answering points are able to more efficiently and effectively handle video, photos and text. Nationwide implementation of NG9-1-1 will result in an interconnected system of local and regional emergency service networks and will improve the ability of emergency services to share information among the various stakeholders.

A \$1.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration provided funding for the upgrade of Iowa's 9-1-1 system to an IP-based system. A \$1.3 million match came from Iowa's wireless surcharge carryover funds.

Information on Iowa's 9-1-1 program can be found at www.homelandsecurity.iowa.gov/programs/E_911.html.

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The Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division leads, coordinates and supports homeland security and emergency management functions in order to establish sustainable communities and ensure economic opportunities for Iowa and its citizens.

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