

# Could Auto Correct Jeopardize Public Safety in a Text-to-911 Situation?

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As absurd as it sounds, there are benefits to the text-to-911 plan that all the major carriers have agreed to roll out. Set aside how ridiculous it will look for people to stand over a person in distress and appear completely aloof as they stare at their phone, and a few pros will emerge.

Deaf and hearing-impaired individuals must rely upon [technology](#) [1] like teletypewriters (TTY) or telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) in an emergency. Being able to send a text from a mobile device will present one more option, a clear benefit.

Besides, the rate of speed at which many can text probably equals or exceeds how fast they can talk. Of course, text-to-911 won't replace the old-fashioned method of calling.

But, as Apple [questions](#) [2] how the initiative will affect its OTT iMessage application, a somewhat serious concern must be addressed: Could Auto Correct jeopardize public safety in a text-to-911 situation?

Apple's often-overzealous spell check feature has been the subject of much criticism for years now. The website [Damn You Auto Correct!](#) [3] is a veritable museum of good-intentioned texts turned humiliating. You can just see iPhone users shaking their fists to the sky as iMessage continually inserts baffling replacement words.

Thus far it appears the feature has only caused minor suffering to those sending the texts and major amusement for everyone reading them. But, in all seriousness, what would happen if Auto Correct turned your extremely urgent and vital emergency text into an incoherent mess?

Take this [example](#) [4] from Damn You Auto Correct: The individual attempted to ask someone if they worked close to King and Spadina, an intersection in Toronto, and what came out was "Do you wear clothes to Haiti and vagina." iMessage is somewhat notorious for changing proper names into whatever it sees fit. If someone had been texting 911 to alert them to an emergency at the corner of King and Spadina and accidentally sent out "Haiti and vagina," two outcomes, neither helpful in aiding speedy response, are likely.

First, the emergency call center professionals won't be able to decipher this text. It is complete nonsense so who can blame them. So while they wait for another, comprehensible message to arrive, seconds tick by, each one vital to whomever is in need of help.

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Second, if text-to-911 gains popularity and call centers begin to see more text messages—therefore increasing the amount of Auto Corrected dribble--it will become more difficult to tell if someone's phone has really just inserted an awkward sexual reference into an emergency text or if someone is having fun with 911. Text-to-911 will already add new responsibilities to the job and it will be hard enough translating all the acronyms and broken language that text speak has to offer. Having to decide if an inappropriate text is really just Auto Correct's weird logical conclusion when presented with an address or location it doesn't recognize will just be another wrinkle no one wants to deal with.

Give the texters of America some credit, though. We're hardly new to this. In fact, we've gotten pretty good at it, and we know when to take extra grammatical care with a text, which would go double for a text to 911. But, judging by the sheer volume of autocorrect blunders every day, Auto Correct remains an often helpful, just as often frustrating texting technology that we're still trying to figure out.

Being a 911 operator is a stressful job and those men and women deserve a good laugh every now and then. But if it comes at the expense of someone in trouble, it won't be very funny.

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### **Links:**

- [1] <http://www.911.gov/911-issues/serving.html>
- [2] <http://www.wirelessweek.com/news/2012/12/apple-questions-text-911-rules>
- [3] <http://www.damnyouautocorrect.com>
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