

County urges extra steps when using VOIP to call 9-1-1

Lanark County Emergency Services is reminding the public about what they need to know when it comes to using 9-1-1 service, especially in light of recent issues surrounding the use of Voice Over Internet Protocol systems (VOIP).

"Although 9-1-1 is designed to be easy to use, there are a few things people need to bear in mind to ensure they get the help they need when they need it, especially if they use VOIP," said Rick Hannah, the county's emergency services coordinator.

VOIP is a way for people to use the Internet to make calls instead of through a traditional telephone line. There are many different applications and VOIP products available. It is sometimes called Internet telephony, IP telephony or Voice over the Internet (VOI).

"Most companies that provide VOIP include an emergency 9-1-1 service, but it is a little bit different than the standard service," Mr. Hannah said. "For instance, on a traditional telephone the emergency response centre sees your call-back number and location, but that may not be the case with VOIP and your call may not be directed to the nearest emergency response centre. Users need to take extra steps to ensure emergency services can find them in an emergency. It could save a life."

Here are some key items to note when using VOIP:

1. Ensure your VOIP provider offers emergency 9-1-1 service. Some require you to activate it.
2. When you sign up with a VOIP service provider, make sure your location information is current at all times. (If you cannot speak when you call, emergency responders may be sent to your last registered address, so it must be up to date.)
3. Ensure you know your location, including the civic address number, street/road name and the municipality (town or township). For example, 217 Harper Road, Tay Valley Township – not Glen Tay.
4. Ensure you know your call-back number. (Four-party telephone lines also do not display this.)
5. Do not hang up unless you are told to do so. If you are disconnected, call 9-1-1 again.
6. VOIP will not function during a power or Internet outage or if your service is suspended or terminated. It may also experience problems during network congestion or equipment malfunction.
7. Make sure guests are aware of VOIP procedures.

CAO Kurt Greaves notes people must be sure to use 9-1-1 responsibly. "The 9-1-1 service is for emergencies, so you should call if someone is taking or damaging someone else's property, if someone is hurt and needs help, if you see an act of violence or if you see a fire out of control," he said.

No matter whether they are calling from a landline, cell phone or using VOIP, callers to 9-1-1 will be asked for their name, the phone number from which they are calling, the civic address and a description of the problem.

"It's important that Lanark County residents and visitors be aware of these simple safety precautions when it comes to using 9-1-1 service," said Warden Richard Kidd (Beckwith Reeve). "It will go a long way toward keeping people in our community safe."

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For more information, contact:

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