

DHS Science and Technology Directorate Text-to-911 Translation

Developing Technology to Translate Foreign Language Texts for Dispatch

The ability to text emergency messages to 911 is currently being deployed in locations across the nation. Domestic violence situations, home break-ins, carjackings, mass shootings and hostage situations are but a few examples of danger where verbally calling 911 could draw attention to victims and exacerbate an already dangerous situation. For many citizens, residents and visitors in America with limited English proficiency, emergency situations can become even more complicated when trying to communicate with emergency services. As Text-to-911 technology continues to grow, programs to help this segment of the U.S. population will be needed.

A new service to enhance communication between first responders and those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Census data reveals that 61 million people nationwide speak a language other than English at home. Twenty-eight million of those citizens and residents self-identify as LEP, and a variety of federal directives, as well as state and local laws, require that 911 be available to these populations. Immediate collaboration is needed among industry, standards setting organizations, Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), 911 call center technology providers and policy makers. Together, these entities need to address interoperability, technology needs and standards to enhance communication between emergency service providers and those with limited English language abilities.

Project: Rapid, Reliable and Secure Translation of Texts

The Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) is working with a project team that includes two major non-profit public safety associations, the Integrated Justice Information Systems (IJIS) Institute and the Industry Council for Emergency Response Technologies (iCERT), along with CyraCom, an industry-leading language translation service provider, to develop, pilot and test a solution. The result of this program will be a standard for implementing text-to-911 to LEP populations, as well as operational, business and training protocols that will ensure a consistent national implementation.



A solution for real-time translation of incoming and outgoing non-English texts in PSAPs that have implemented text-to-911

New Capability Speeds Public Safety Response to Life-Critical Incidents

PSAPs currently utilize interpreters to serve LEP populations that call 911. A solution for real-time translation of incoming and outgoing non-English texts in PSAPs that have implemented text-to-911 does not exist. Language Service Providers must develop an entirely new service to ensure that rapid, reliable and secure translation of texts between a 911 operator and a “texter” is commercially available.

Industry Partners

The Integrated Justice Information Systems (IJIS) Institute in Ashburn, Virginia, provides technical assistance, training, and support services for information exchange and technology initiatives; serving the public safety and homeland security sectors. Partnering with the Industry Council for Emergency Response Technologies (iCERT) and CyraCom, Team IJIS is leveraging iCERT’s relationships with the emergency response communications sector and CyraCom’s experience providing interpretation and translation services to create suitable standards and architecture for text-to-911 translation capabilities nationwide.



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To learn more about Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Text-to-911, contact SandTFRG@hq.dhs.gov.