

International Calls to 9-1-1 in the U.S.: What to Know & What We're Doing About It

International visitors to the U.S.—more than 70 million per year—can make emergency calls in the United States. **But those calls may not work the same as they do at home or from U.S. phones.** As global travel surges with events like the 2026 FIFA World Cup Games and the 2028 Olympic Games, this is an important public safety issue that requires heightened public awareness and action.

What's Different About International Calls?

When someone visiting the United States uses a mobile phone from another country to call 9-1-1 or another emergency number, international roaming and other technical factors come into play. As a result:

- Calls may fail or take longer to connect to 9-1-1 if the caller's phone has not connected to a U.S. carrier's network before placing the call.
- Location information may be less precise.
- Text-to-9-1-1 *does not* work on international phones.
- Translators should be available, but with a delay.

Why This Matters

During large public events or emergencies, **these challenges can increase risk**—especially if callers assume the system works as it does at home. These limitations can make it harder for emergency telecommunicators to:

- Quickly identify where the caller is
- Communicate effectively, especially if there is a language barrier

The Path Forward

NENA and its partners are working with industry and standards bodies to improve how international emergency calls are handled. Meanwhile, **public awareness and local preparation are essential** to ensure international visitors can get help when they need it.

What Visitors from Other Nations Need to Know Before Calling 9-1-1

If you are visiting the United States, need emergency help, and don't have a U.S. phone:

- International visitors should connect to a U.S. network upon arrival, even if they turn off wireless roaming for the rest of their trip. This will reduce failures or long call setup times during an emergency.
- **Place a voice call to 9-1-1.** Other emergency numbers may work, but 9-1-1 is the emergency number in the U.S.
- Do not text 9-1-1 or any other emergency number.
- Wait for the call to connect. It may take longer than you expect if your phone is not already connected to a U.S. carrier network. Do NOT hang up; stay on the line until your call connects.
- If the call disconnects, try again.
- Stay on the line until you are told to hang up.
- Stay calm and clearly state your location—an address, landmark, venue, or hotel and room number—before describing the emergency.
- In short, **Call 9-1-1. Get help with calling if needed. Describe your location and emergency.**

What Americans Need to Know to Help International Visitors

If someone near you is experiencing an emergency and needs help reaching 9-1-1:

- Make the call for them from your U.S.-based phone.
- If you are placed on hold, stay on the line until you are told to hang up.
- Describe the location before describing the situation.
- If it is safe to do so, stay with the visitor until help arrives.

What 9-1-1 Authorities Are Doing

These issues are not failures of 9-1-1 but rather gaps in how international networks connect to it. NENA and the telecommunications industry are proactively addressing both public education and potential long-term fixes. Emergency communications centers are preparing by:

- Coordinating with wireless carriers, technology providers, and event organizers
- Testing how international calls behave in their systems
- Updating procedures and training for these scenarios
- Using supplemental tools to improve emergency call information