



WATAUGA COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS & EMERGENCY SERVICES

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Watauga County's **Enhanced 911** service was established in 1996. Enhanced 911 allows callers to dial one number, 911, for help in emergencies requiring law enforcement, fire, and/or medical personnel. This process would be "enhanced" because the telephone company would send the caller's name, address, phone number, and appropriate responding agencies to the telecommunicator's screen when a 911 call is placed by a landline phone.

Working closely with officials from the local and regional United States Post Offices (USPS) and also the telephone companies, the countywide addressing project began in 1992. Property owners on all roads serving three or more residences and/or businesses were contacted to name their roads, and house numbers were assigned to each residence and building in the county. The USPS agreed to implement these 911 location addresses as mailing addresses. By 1996 all residents in Watauga County had received an address notification letter along with the appropriate house numbers to be posted to designate their location.

Ongoing **address assignment** and notification in addition to **street name and subdivision name approval** continue to be handled by the 911 Addressing Office. This office works with the Planning and Inspections departments throughout Watauga County so that these processes can be completed smoothly and efficiently.

During this process the county began to provide installation of **street signs** on all roads in the unincorporated portions of Watauga County to further implement location of 911 callers. The Addressing Office is responsible for ordering signs for new streets and also for taking calls for signs that need to be replaced or repaired. Since the Sign Department works for Watauga County, this process is usually handled quickly.

In the late 1990's cellular technology created an increase in the number of residents using mobile/cell phones. Since **cell phone** users could call from any location, wireless providers sent the latitude/longitude information along with the caller's cell phone number rather than the name, address, phone number, and responding agencies information provided by landline phone providers. Initially 911 calls made from a cell phone provided only the latitude/longitude location of the cell tower along with the caller's cell phone number.

As technology improved the county requested all wireless carriers to provide the latitude/longitude of the caller. In addition, the county created **mapping** in the Communications Center that would plot the latitude/longitude of the cellular caller and the street address of landline callers so that telecommunicators would have an additional method to more quickly locate the 911 caller's location. This step insures that the correct emergency responders can be sent. Since the location technology used by wireless carriers varies in its accuracy due to many factors, telecommunicators still coordinate the location information the caller provides with the mapping technology.

In the last decade technology continued to advance. Internet providers, such as Vonage, Charter, etc., began to offer phone service using **Voice over Internet Protocol**. Callers with this service provide their name, address, and telephone number to their internet provider. That information is sent by the VoIP provider to the telecommunicator's screen with a 911 call. Once again the county works with these internet providers to insure that the information provided is correct. In addition, the location of these callers is also plotted on the mapping system.