

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-252](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, millions of Americans call 911 for help during emergencies. However, the nation's legacy 911 system relies on aging infrastructure that is not designed to accommodate modern communications technologies. As a result, states and localities are upgrading to NG911, which offers improved capabilities, such as the ability to process images, audio files, and video. While deploying NG911 is the responsibility of state and local entities, federal agencies also support implementation, led by NHTSA's National 911 Program, which facilitates collaboration among federal, state, and local 911 stakeholders.

GAO was asked to review NG911 implementation nationwide. This report examines: (1) state and local progress and challenges in implementing NG911 and (2) federal actions to address challenges and planned next steps. GAO reviewed relevant statutes, regulations, and federal agency reports and plans. GAO also analyzed NHTSA's survey data on state 911 implementation for calendar year 2015, the most recent year for which data were available, and interviewed federal officials, state and local officials from nine states (selected to represent different regions and various phases of NG911 implementation), and officials from industry and advocacy groups.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that NHTSA's National 911 Program develop performance goals and measures and, for the National NG911 Roadmap, determine agencies' roles and responsibilities and develop an implementation plan. NHTSA agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-18-252](#). For more information, contact Mark Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

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NEXT GENERATION 911

National 911 Program Could Strengthen Efforts to Assist States

What GAO Found

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) National 911 Program's most recent national survey on Next Generation 911 (NG911) implementation indicated that about half of states were in some phase of transition to NG911 in 2015, but that state and local progress varied. Specifically, 10 states reported that all 911 authorities in their state processed calls using NG911 systems; however, 18 states reported having no state or local NG911 transition plans in place—which may indicate these states were in the early phases of planning for the transition to NG911 or had not yet begun. GAO spoke with state and local 911 officials in 9 states, which were in various phases of implementing NG911, and found that none of the 9 selected states were accepting images, audio files, or video. State and local 911 officials identified a number of challenges to implementing NG911. Such challenges are related to funding, evolving technology and operations, and governance. For example, officials in 3 states said that the current funding they collect from telephone service subscribers may not be sufficient to support NG911's transition costs while simultaneously funding the operation of existing 911 systems.

Federal agencies—including NHTSA, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the Federal Communications Commission, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security—have responsibilities to support NG911 implementation, such as through coordinating activities and administering grants, and are taking actions to assist state and local entities in addressing challenges to NG911's implementation. Such actions include developing resources, offering technical assistance, and convening stakeholders to explore emerging NG911 issues. For example, as the lead entity for coordinating federal NG911 efforts, NHTSA's National 911 Program is developing resources on NG911 topics, such as federal funding and governance structures. While the National 911 Program is taking steps to facilitate the state and local transition to NG911, the program lacks specific performance goals and measures to assess its progress. Without such goals and measures, it is not clear to what extent the program is effectively achieving its mission.

In 2018, the National 911 Program plans to establish an interagency initiative tasked with creating a National NG911 Roadmap. This roadmap is intended to identify next steps for the federal government in supporting the creation of a national, interconnected NG911 system. While the National 911 Program is taking steps to develop a list of national-level tasks as part of its roadmap initiative, the program does not have a plan to identify: (1) roles or responsibilities for federal entities to carry out these tasks or (2) how the program plans to achieve the roadmap's objectives. Collaborating with the appropriate federal agencies to determine federal roles and responsibilities to carry out the roadmap's national-level tasks could reduce barriers to agencies effectively working together to achieve those tasks. Furthermore, developing an implementation plan that details how the roadmap's tasks will be achieved would place the National 911 Program in a better position to effectively lead interagency efforts to implement NG911 nationwide.