



It's People We Need More of, Not Technology

By Barry Furey

The past seven days have been a banner week for posts about 9-1-1 technology. Some of them have been fantastic news, such as the work being done by Rapid SOS and the new Apple operating system. From what I can see, these initiatives deliver what we should have had right along – accurate wireless location. But, as often occurs, scouring the Internet became a case of “first the good news, then the bad news.” Because we have little control over what technology vendors produce, not all of it is helpful. And, because we have absolutely no control over how or to whom it is advertised, many questionable products take on an undeserved golden glow. It seems that on the heels of the recent successes mentioned above, some companies have decided to jump on the bandwagon with products that “help you call 9-1-1.” Except in many cases they don’t. They help you call their central station, who will gladly monitor your safety for a monthly fee. Or, they offer no monthly fees because the device they

are selling you is really an inactivated handset that takes advantage of the FCC's ruling on emergency access. In a world where people gripe about 50 cent monthly 9-1-1 fees, I've often wondered what magic it takes to get them to shell out more for something that has questionable benefits. And, if you're like me, you stop far short of welcoming more dead telephones that provide us with little or no information to the mix.

I was also treated to some information about the "house of the future" that will call 9-1-1 for you. Really? Again, on the surface this sounds like Utopia. Unless you work in a PSAP. Then it sounds like a tool of the devil. For years we advised folks not to put 9-1-1 on speed dial in order to reduce accidental calls. Our efforts were countered by developers who designed phones that summoned help when simply sat upon. Technology that brought us intelligent crash notification is promising, but that's activated by a very special set of circumstances. Will your smart home dial 9-1-1 when your smoke detector activates or your burglar alarm trips? If so, Katie bar the door. I can't tell you how many burnt toast and steamy shower calls I've rolled to, but it's a heck of a lot more than real fires that were reported by automatic alarms. And even though I'm the careful sort, I've accidentally activated my home security system on more than a single occasion. Actual fire versus activation rates are pretty low, and I the priority for residential burglar alarms at many agencies I know falls well below anything resembling an emergency. Do we really need more questionable calls when we can't even handle the real emergencies we have now?

While properly designed technology can be a blessing, poorly crafted tools can be a curse. What we really need more of is people. But you already knew that.