

Private Branch Exchange / Multi-Line Telephone Systems
PBX / MLTS

The shortfall that PBX/MLTS present to 9-1-1 and emergency responders...a life-threatening reality that can be corrected

The 9-1-1 centers and public safety responders rely on accurate automatic location information to be provided to the 9-1-1 centers in the event that callers who cannot relay their location information and need emergency services can be found in short-order. Installed home (wireline) phones produce the address of the individual subscriber to the 9-1-1 centers via a database listing the address of the caller's (phone number and address are accurately maintained and linked). Multi-line Telephone Systems (MLTS), including Private Branch Exchanges (PBX), usually provide only the phone number and location of the billing address to the 9-1-1 centers. Technical solutions, including databases linking internal phone numbers (extensions) to more precise locations such as suite/apartment number and/or floor level, are available, but are not being used on a widespread basis.

This means in many cases, if someone calls for an ambulance from an elementary school, for example, the location the 9-1-1 center will receive is the address of the main school administrative offices which may be miles away and even perhaps in another jurisdiction. This also holds true for other PBX systems. Branch banks, for example, reporting robberies transmit the main office address, not the address of the branch office. Utility employees calling for help from satellite sub-stations transmit the address of the central office. Panicked hotel or nursing home guests who don't know their room numbers, or who can't speak, may have to be found by responders going door to door, while losing precious time.

Many corporations (large and small), hotels, schools, universities and government agencies employ Multi-Line Telephone Systems (MLTS). These systems are characterized by a central switchboard and a number of extensions which usually require the dialing of an extra digit (such as "9") to reach an outside phone connection. Increasingly, residential complexes are also turning to MLTS for their residents. It has been estimated that perhaps as many as half of the population is living, working, or studying "behind" an MLTS or PBX each day.

Many entities with MLTS or PBX systems are unaware of the problem. Those who are aware may believe they have little incentive to correct the problem. Therefore, many communities are relying on employee or consumer pressure and legislated mandates to ensue this problem is corrected. Very few communities, and fewer states, have required MLTS or PBX owner/operators to install the available technological fix, keep the necessary databases up-to-date, or even require awareness education to the many users of these flawed systems.

No location, or inaccurate location information squanders critical time for response to an emergency. Location information is one of the most significant elements in prompt, appropriate response to an emergency. APCO leads the way in seeking solutions to these public safety issues.