



VRS/IP Relay & E9-1-1 Access

Frequently Asked Questions

Please refer to NENA and APCO's websites: www.nena.org & www.apco911.org

For more information, please contact
the Communications Center & 9-1-1 Services Department
911Services@apcointl.org

Q: What is Video Relay Service?

Video Relay Service (VRS) enables a person who is deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing or has speech disabilities to use sign language or speech reading to communicate with any telephone user via a Video Interpreter (VI) at a relay service call center. The user has a videophone or webcam connected to a video relay service call center using an internet connection.

Q: What is Internet Protocol (IP) Relay Service?

IP Relay Service is a text-based communication service that allows a person who is deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing or has speech disabilities to communicate with any telephone user via a Communication Assistant (CA) at a relay service call center using an Internet connection. IP Relay is accessed using a computer or wireless handheld device and the Internet, rather than a TTY and a telephone.

Q: What does VI/CA stand for?

VI/CA equals video interpreter/communication assistant. In a VRS call, the CA is a skilled sign language interpreter referred to as a VI (Video Interpreter) who can see the video caller via a video device and an internet connection. The VI interprets and relays between the ASL (American Sign Language) user and the speaking person. In an IP Relay call, the Communication Assistant(CA) relays back and forth between the text user and the speaking person.

Q: How are emergency calls placed via VRS and IP Relay delivered to the PSAP?

When the relay user has registered their location with a default VRS and/or IP Relay provider and kept that location information up to date the call enters via the 9-1-1 system and data populates the ANI/ALI screen similar to a VoIP call. When the user has failed to register or keep their location up to date, the call will come into the ten digit emergency number (no ANI/ALI) of the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP).

Q: How does call back work?

Call back is achieved by calling back the relay user's ten digit number listed on the ANI/ALI screen. A VI/CA will answer the call and make contact with the caller for you. Note: the ten digit call back number may be a toll free (800 type) number.

Q: What is unique about VRS and IP Relay assisted emergency calls?

The information on the existing ALI screens will be different. The use of VI/CA may introduce a time delay on delivery of the question and/or the response.

Q: What are the VI/CA's legal limitations in communicating with the call taker?

The VI/CA may or may not be able to provide visual or auditory information as to what they see or hear in addition to the communication taking place. NENA & APCO have filed a petition for expedited clarification regarding this topic with the FCC, however, as of 12/07/2008, no action has been taken. When the FCC takes action, information will be posted to the NENA & APCO web sites.

Q: How do I contact the VRS/IP Relay service directly? Such as if there is a need to contact the VI/CA directly regarding the call they handled or if I need to speak to their customer service department?

You will need to look up the provider's ID and phone number to call them directly. A Company ID link is provided on the NENA website (www.NENA.org) by clicking on the Company ID. It will be the PSAP manager's responsibility to locally maintain these lists with current information for their agency.

Q: How will a 9-1-1 hang-up/abandon call be presented to the PSAP?

The call should come in as a normal hang-up/abandoned call. This could occur when the call is dropped during the transfer from the VRS/IP Relay service to the PSAP, the call taker should follow normal protocols to process an abandoned/hang-up call. Similarly, while the call to the PSAP may be regular (not hang-up/abandoned), the VI/CA may be on the line advising that the caller has disconnected and they are attempting call back. Refer to the Standard Operating Procedure Recommendations document for a possible line of questioning.

Q: How do you end the call?

To properly terminate the call, the call taker should advise the relay user that they have obtained enough information to complete the call and it is ok to end the call. Make certain to advise the caller that if anything changes prior to the arrival of emergency responders to call back immediately.

Q: How do we process calls when the the caller refuses or is unable to confirm/give name and/or proper callback information?

Refer to PSAP protocols.

Q: What are the necessary questions that the 9-1-1 call taker should ask?

The call taker should not handle these calls any differently than any other 9-1-1 call. Follow your local protocols to gather appropriate information.

Q: How long or what is the time limit that the interpreter will interpret on an in progress call?

It is important for a call taker to know that an interpreter may change during an emergency call. Sometimes there will be a team of interpreters working together to provide communication services. Interpreters may rotate in order to remain fresh to be able to provide accurate and effective communication. An Interpreter will be on line until the call is completed.

Q: Can a PSAP request that a video interpreter be changed during a 9-1-1 call?

Yes, you can request a new interpreter if you feel that there is not effective communication. This is the same process as dealing with a spoken language interpreters; this is not a new concept.

Q: When the relay service is disconnected with the VRS caller what should the PSAP do?

Due to the nature of the Internet and the dependence of Video Relay Service on Internet connections, occasionally packets are lost in the transmission of video signals between the deaf caller and the Video Relay Service Provider, resulting in a loss of the video connection. When this occurs, the PSAP will still be connected to the Video Interpreter but not the actual caller.

The PSAP should ask the Video Interpreter to reestablish the call to the actual caller. In some instances, the actual caller may intentionally terminate their connection to the Video Interpreter and may choose not to accept the return call, or the technical interruption may persist. In these circumstances, a first responder should be dispatched to the location of the emergency call per standard PSAP protocols.

Q: When the relay service is disconnected with the PSAP, what should the PSAP do?

It is extremely rare that a voice leg of a relay call loses the connection to the Video Relay Service Provider or IP Relay provider. The video relay service provider will still have a video connection to the

caller or the IP-Relay provider will still have an IP-based text connection to the caller and the appropriate provider will attempt to reestablish the connection to the PSAP. If the call is not reestablished to the PSAP within 60 seconds, the PSAP should attempt to re-contact the caller via the 10-digit number that appears as ANI & within ALI and was verbally confirmed by the call taker at the beginning of the call.

If the PSAP is unable to reestablish a connection to the original caller, a first responder should be dispatched to the location of the emergency call per standard PSAP protocols.

Q: How much information is enough to process the call? IE: disconnection

You will need to rely upon local protocol to make a determination. The minimum information to get any call started would be the location of the incident. Any additional information will be dependent on the nature of the incident.

Q: Will there be any CAD issues upon pull over from the 9-1-1 screen?

There will be two differences in the 9-1-1 screen information that will need consideration, those two fields being Call Agent ID # and Company Name (Company ID #). The provider name will be placed in an existing field that will correspond to the type of information delivered, which is the company ID field. However the call agent ID # will be placed in one of the address fields. You will need to speak with your local telephone and CAD vendors to see if this new information will present a problem.

Q: Will SOP's need to be written for calls with endangered callers? IE: hostage situations

Refer to your SOP's that are already in place for endangered callers, keeping in mind you may have to advise the VI/CA not to reconnect with the caller.

Q: Will there be any sound heard by the VI/CA and how will the PSAP be aware of that?

On most relay calls the VI will not be able to hear audio from the caller. The call taker needs to ask the VI if they have the ability to hear sounds from the caller. For additional information regarding this topic, please check answer to earlier question "What are the VI/CA's legal limitations in communicating with the call taker?"

Q: Do the VRS/IP Relay service providers keep records/recordings of the calls delivered to 9-1-1?

The record of the existence of the call is retained, but **no** recordings or content materials (notes) concerning the call are retained (per FCC rules & other requirements).

Q: What about practice/training calls?

Frequent referral to the training material supplied is suggested, as well as some sort of mock training. Due to the high volume of calls already coming into the relay service providers it is not feasible to use them during the mock training. It is also suggested that you contact your local relay user community to get their input and suggestions.