

Charleston County can now more accurately target where 911 cell phone calls come from

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The Charleston County Consolidated 911 Center, pictured in operation during [Tropical Storm Irma](#) in September 2017.

The Charleston 911 center in recent weeks took steps to bolster the location information that dispatchers receive from Android mobile phones during emergency calls.

Jim Lake, director of the Charleston County Consolidated Dispatch Center, said that beginning Sept. 10, dispatchers can access location information transmitted from Google Emergency Location Services as opposed to receiving it from the phones themselves — which tends to be less reliable.

When calling 911, landline phones can give their exact location, whereas [cell phones](#) typically provide broader and less accurate estimates, an issue that has b The Charleston 911 center now can receive that location information from virtually all smartphone devices. Before officially adopting the technology from Google this month, dispatchers previously did not have the means to obtain this information from Android devices.

Google ELS makes the data available to a third-party database overseen by RapidSOS, a company that stores and transmits 911 data to public safety agencies [nationwide](#) that use its services. RapidSOS is a free service available to law enforcement agencies. The same information is also available from Apple devices.

With the location information from Google, dispatchers can more precisely pinpoint a caller's location, Lake said. The change is a welcome one, he added, considering that more than 80 percent of the county's 911 calls come from cellphones.

https://www.postandcourier.com/news/charleston-county-can-now-more-accurately-target-where-cell-phone/article_4d6bb6a0-c018-11e8-8345-77baf2dc050.html

"Both Google and Apple will rip the [GPS](#) location to your phone and send it behind the scenes (to RapidSOS)," Lake said. "So you won't even know it's being done. But it's only when they dial 911."

RapidSOS and Google have piloting the location services program early this year by bringing it to participating agencies, including the Charleston County Consolidated Dispatch Center.

"Our testing with Google proved to us (the new location data was) more accurate than what we were getting from the 911 call itself," Lake said.

Fiona Lee, who oversees partnerships at Google for the Android Emergency Operations Team, said that Google has been working with mobile carrier T-Mobile for about four years to develop and [test](#) the technology.

"Most consumers have smart phones. They're used to using services that tell them where their friends are or when a pizza arrives," Lee said. "They expect to have the same service when they call 911 ... when time is of the essence."

Lake added that the new service being used by the 911 center is especially helpful during emergency calls from tourists and those less aware of the area's geography.

"If they need assistance, we're able to pull their location from their phone," he said.

But Lake cautioned technology is no panacea, and it still helps to be aware of your surroundings.

"Sometimes technology doesn't work the way it's supposed to," he said. "So, nothing is a replacement for the person knowing where they are."

efuddled 911 operating centers.