

Duff on Hospitality Law

The Search for a Uniform 911 System

By Greg Duff on 1.24.14 | Posted in Hotels

In a [letter sent to major hotel chains](#), FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai urged hotels to program their telephones to be able to dial 911 without first dialing 9. The motivation behind this initiative is the death of Kari Hunt Dunn, who was stabbed to death at the Baymont Inn in Marshall, Texas this past December, while her daughter unsuccessfully attempted to dial 911 for help. The Baymont Inn's phone system required all guests to dial 9 before dialing 911. As a result, the daughter was unable to reach emergency services.

Commissioner Pai proposes a uniform 911 system: "when consumers dial 911, they need to reach emergency personnel; it shouldn't matter...whether they are using a phone at a hotel, motel, or office building. If you dial 911 in a large building, you need to reach someone qualified to help." Commissioner Pai's letter asks hotel owners to answer the following questions by **February 14, 2014**:

- How many hotel and motel properties in the United States does your company own?
- In how many of those properties would a guest dialing 911 from the phone in his or her room reach a Public Safety Answering Point or 911 call center? In such cases, does the phone system also alert a hotel employee that an emergency call has been placed?
- In how many of those properties would a guest dialing 911 from the phone in his or her room reach a hotel employee? In those cases, have hotel employees answering such calls received appropriate training in how to respond to emergency calls?
- In how many of those properties would a guest dialing 911 from the phone in his or her room not complete a call to anyone?
- If your company has any properties where a guest dialing 911 from the phone in his or her room does not reach emergency personnel, what is your company's plan for remedying this situation? If you do not have a plan, why not?

In response to Commissioner Pai's letter and media attention given to the issue, the [American Hotel & Lodging Association](#) ("AHLA") has created a task force to develop recommendations on how this problem could be addressed. Commissioner Pai responded favorably to the proposed AHLA task force in a statement last Friday, saying that he was "pleased" and that he "urge[s] the task force to work with dispatch to find simple solutions" to the issue. AHLA President, Katherine Lugar, noted however that there might not be a simple fix in all cases because hotels

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must “take into consideration a variety of factors, both internal, including operational challenges, and external, including municipal, county, and state requirements.”

If you did not receive a letter there's no need to respond to the questions above, but please take this opportunity to review your own call systems to see how they function when 911 is called. If you have further questions regarding the initiative or how you might get involved, please contact [Greg Duff](#).

Tags: 911, Ajit Pai, FCC Commissioner