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The Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet held a hearing this morning to review the accessibility of emergency communications systems for Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephones.

NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Committee Reviews Emergency-911 Access for Voice-Over Internet Protocol Telephones

Washington, D.C. — The Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet held a hearing this morning to review the accessibility of emergency communications systems for Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephones. The hearing examined H.R. 3043, the “911 Modernization and Public Safety Act of 2007”, proposed legislation to ensure that all telephones — whether landline, cellular or internet protocol — share equal access to emergency-911 operators.

“As we continue to see changes in the way people make phone calls, Congress has been mindful to ensure that the 9-1-1 system also evolves,” said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. “An increasing number of Americans now use a technology called ‘Voice over Internet Protocol’ to make phone calls. It is therefore appropriate to once again update our laws so that consumers can be confident of receiving emergency assistance when they dial 9-1-1 from a VoIP connection.”

"When Americans pick up a phone to call 911, they want to know it'll work, regardless of whether they're using a traditional phone, an Internet phone, or a mobile phone. Today's hearing and the legislation we discussed are important steps toward making sure everyone who dials 911 in an emergency, gets the help they need," said Congressman Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet.

H.R. 3043, introduced by Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN), would require that emergency call centers handle calls from all phones equally. Dingell, Markey and other lawmakers have expressed concern that emergency-911 call centers may receive and handle calls differently according to the type of phone used to place the call.

The hearing's witnesses included industry representatives who testified on the emergency 911 systems currently in place. Jason Barbour, a nationally certified Emergency Number Professional who testified on behalf of the National Emergency Number Association and the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials, stressed the importance of adapting evolving technologies for emergency response purposes. Barbour, who is also a volunteer firefighter in Johnston County, NC, specifically cited picture-messaging as a potentially useful tool for communication between crime-scene witnesses and emergency operators.

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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