

Agenda Date: February 11, 2004
Item Number: A1

Docket: UT-040096

Company Name: Qwest Corporation

Staff: Suzanne Stillwell, Consumer Affairs Supervisor

Staff Recommendation:

Grant the request for temporary exemption of WAC 480-120-263(3)(b), (5)(c) and (d), and WAC 480-120-450(1)(c), exempting Qwest from its obligation to provide E-911 service at three pay phones at Western State Hospital to allow Qwest to conduct a 60-day trial of the Emergency Quick Access Key for those three locations.

Background:

On May 23, 2003, Qwest filed a petition at the Commission asking for an exemption from specific rules that would allow it to route E-911 calls made from designated pay phones to the hospital's communications center instead of the public safety answering point (PSAP). The Commission granted the exemption on June 11, 2003. The exemption allowed Qwest to redirect E-911 calls placed from the designated pay phones to the hospital's communications center. Communications center personnel would evaluate the call and, if deemed to be an emergency, would route the call to the PSAP. After receiving the exemption, however, Qwest realized that its pay phones at Western State Hospital did not have the proper technology to reroute E-911 calls from its communication center to the PSAP.

Since that time, Qwest, the hospital, and local emergency responders have consistently experienced E-911 calls placed by patients that are not an emergency (624 false E-911 calls between November 1, 2003, and January 31, 2004). Qwest removed pay phones from the single ward from which the majority of calls were placed. Those patients now must alert the ward staff in an emergency situation. In the other wards, the hospital wants the option of allowing patients access to pay phones to make calls to their advocacy groups, family members, and other persons or organizations integral to their care.

On January 22, 2004, Qwest Corporation (Qwest) petitioned the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) for a temporary exemption from certain provisions of WAC 480-120-263 and WAC 480-120-450(1)(c). These rules require pay phone service providers to allow access to E-911 at all pay phones. Qwest asks, in its petition, that it be exempted from the E-911 requirements for 60 days for three pay phones located within Western State Hospital.

Instead of E-911 access, patients or other users would push a 'Quick Access Key' on the pay phone, designated by the word "emergency" in bright red letters. The emergency key is directly connected to the hospital's communications center. The pay phone number is displayed by the communications center's PBX. Communications center personnel can locate the ward that originated the emergency call and take appropriate action to deal with the situation. If an actual

emergency exits, the hospital staff will follow its normal procedures for a medical emergency or fire.

The Western State Hospital staff has access to E-911 at all times, including those areas where pay phones will have the Emergency Quick Access key. Wards are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week with two or more direct care staff. There are three or four phones in the central nurse's station on each ward and a phone in each individual on-ward office space. All of these phones are non-pay phones and E-911 capable.

Qwest requests it be allowed to implement its Emergency Quick Access key solution on three pay phones for a 60-day period. It believes that this trial will allow it to document how effective the emergency Quick Access key solution works. If the trial is successful, the hospital may expand it to the balance of its pay phones at Western State Hospital.

Discussion:

Due to the ongoing problems with high volumes of non-emergency and false-alarm pay phone calls being placed by patients at Western State Hospital to the Pierce County E-911 Center, Staff believes this is a reasonable request.

Staff consulted with Bob Oenning, E-911 Administrator, of the State's Emergency Management Division. Mr. Oenning believes this is a reasonable request and supports staff's recommendation for an exemption to allow Qwest to trial its emergency Quick Action key on three pay phones located in Western State Hospital.

Conclusion:

Staff recommends the Commission grant the request for temporary exemption of WAC 480-120-263(3)(b), (5)(c) and (d), and WAC 480-120-450(1)(c), exempting Qwest from its obligation to provide E-911 service at three pay phones at Western State Hospital to allow Qwest to conduct a 60-day trial of the Emergency Quick Access Key for those three locations.