

ESNs and ESZs

The ESN (Emergency Service Number) is a code assigned to each line of the MSAG. It tells the dispatcher which fire protection, law enforcement and emergency medical service to send to any given address in the county. The ESN is a core element in the Enhanced 9-1-1 system. With ESNs, valuable time is saved as the dispatcher no longer needs to consult a map nor ask the caller to determine which agency to dispatch to a particular call. If someone calls from within the city of Newton, for example, their name, telephone number, 9-1-1 address, community and ESN are all displayed. The ESN displayed in this case tells the dispatcher to send Newton City Police, Newton Volunteer Fire Dept and/or North Central Ambulance. If the call originated from outside the city limits, a different ESN would be displayed, perhaps directing the dispatcher to send the James County Sheriff's Department, Newton Volunteer Fire Dept and/or North Central Ambulance.

ESN boundaries are determined by overlaying Fire Service Boundaries, Ambulance Service Boundaries and Law Enforcement Boundaries (usually corporate limits) on the same map. Every polygon on this composite map has its own ESN and all road segments in that polygon are coded with this ESN in the MSAG. Each polygon is a separate ESZ (Emergency Service Zone). Where boundaries are determined by roads, homes on one side of the road (even numbers) are often coded with a different ESN than the homes on the other side of the road (odd numbers). It is not uncommon for a rural county to have 25-50 distinct ESNs.

A change in an emergency service boundary will change the composition of a particular ESZ. For example, if the city of Newton annexed a rural subdivision, this subdivision would then be covered by the city police instead of the sheriff's department. The ESN for all the addresses in this subdivision must be changed on the MSAG so that the proper response agencies would be dispatched if a 9-1-1 call originated from this area. It is the county's responsibility to submit the MSAG change paperwork to the serving telephone company.

