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Right here in Cambria County you can text 911 as opposed to calling them but officials are saying it's more convenient to pick up the phone. "Texting-to-911 is a very good option in some situations," 911 Director for Cambria County Robbin Melnyk said.

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Text-to-911 is the ability to send a text message to reach emergency dispatch from your mobile phone or device. Melnyk says this program is best used in situations where callers need to be discrete like a school shooter situation or if your hearing is impaired. Emergency service centers like the one in Cambria County can take these messages. "We have been able to accept text-calls here at the 911 center for about two years," Melnyk said.

The concept is pretty simple. All you have to do is create a new message to 911, and text that number with your address and reason for needing emergency services. The text comes in as a 911 call to the center and dispatch can send automated responses right to your phone. Even though this method is up-to-speed with our technological age, Melnyk says it's not always the best method. "Stressing what the dispatchers are going to say when they answer that call is if you can call us, call us and if you can't then text," Melnyk said.

The biggest issue Melnyk says with texting 911 is the wait time. "Our average text-call commits that dispatcher for about 18 minutes until we have all the information that we need to process those calls," Melnyk said. The average time it takes to process an emergency call over the phone? Roughly four minutes.

Somerset County is one of the local counties that aren't enrolled in the Text-to-911 program. According to 911 Deputy Director of Somerset County Bradley Lavan, there are many components to consider before they're able to enroll in the program. "Each PSAP or Public Safety Answering Point needs to be prepared to intake those calls and requires agreements and contracts with cellphone carriers and also there's work to be done with the FCC," Lavan said.

But Lavan says Text-to-911 is on Somerset County Dispatch's radar. "We are working towards having the necessary hardware, agreements, and contracts in place and implemented," Lavan said. Lavan says Text-to-911 should be coming to Somerset County within this year of 2020. To see a map of what counties accept Text-to-911 and what phone plans they accept visit [here](#). – **WJAC-TV, Johnstown**

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Federal regulators opened a new front in their investigation of big tech companies, seeking to determine whether the industry's giants acquired smaller rivals in ways that harmed competition, hurt consumers and evaded regulatory scrutiny. The Federal Trade Commission on Tuesday ordered Amazon.com Inc., Apple Inc., Facebook Inc., Microsoft Corp. and Google owner Alphabet Inc. to provide detailed information about their acquisitions of fledgling firms over the past 10 years.

The new probe likely will involve hundreds of transactions that never drew federal scrutiny because they were under the dollar-value threshold for antitrust review, which is edging up to \$94 million this

year. “This initiative will enable the commission to take a closer look at acquisitions in this important sector, and also to evaluate whether the federal agencies are getting adequate notice of transactions that might harm competition,” FTC Chairman Joe Simons said.

The FTC said it isn’t conducting the probes for any specific enforcement purpose, though Mr. Simons indicated they could lead regulators to seek to unwind improper acquisitions. The investigation also could prompt the commission to consider rule changes or other action to broaden the scope of acquisitions subject to review, he said. “We look forward to working with the FTC to answer their questions,” a Microsoft spokesperson said. Representatives for Apple, Facebook, Alphabet and Amazon didn’t reply to requests for comment.

The move marks a significant expansion of the government’s already extensive examination of possible antitrust concerns in digital markets. Both the FTC and the Justice Department have been conducting antitrust investigations of tech giants including business practices at Google and Facebook. Critics contend acquisitions by big tech firms show a pattern of establishing “kill zones” around themselves to prevent upstart rivals from posing a competitive threat, and say this can discourage innovation and investment.

Defenders of the tech giants say a small startup’s prospect of being taken over by a major company—and the big payoff that can result—is a spur to investment and innovation. Many tech entrepreneurs start companies with the specific goal of being bought by one of the giants. Mr. Simons said the FTC’s initiative was prompted by the large number of acquisitions that have escaped federal review and “whether there’s something we need to change going forward.” The top five tech firms have made more than 400 acquisitions over the last decade, a blue-ribbon antitrust panel in the U.K. said in March.

Doug Melamed, a Stanford law professor, said the study announced Tuesday “might be more about building a consensus or road map at the commission” on how to proceed in such a complex area. Small acquisitions put “a real burden on antitrust enforcers” to prove that they are anticompetitive, Mr. Melamed said. Moreover, certain deals that meet the value threshold—which has varied over the past decade—can still escape review under current rules, FTC officials said.

The FTC also is looking at deals that don’t involve full-fledged takeovers. That will involve examining potential competitive impacts of minority investments, as well as data acquisitions and licensing arrangements. The agency’s action reflects growing concern in Washington and around the world that some U.S. tech companies have grown so large and powerful that they are squelching competition in various ways and harm consumers. For example, the Justice Department and state attorneys general have been looking at Google’s dominance of ad tech markets.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D., Conn.), a critic of big tech companies, said he welcomed the FTC study, but warned that “it’s no substitute for action.” “It has been clear for a decade that Big Tech is stifling innovation through its catch-and-kill tactics and unfettered market dominance,” he said in a statement. “Every time that Google, Amazon, Apple, and Facebook acquire the latest cutting-edge artificial intelligence startup, innovative wearable device or emerging social network, they irreversibly squash another generation of novel competitors that could benefit consumers and bolster our nation’s technological advancement.”

Sandy Kory, co-founder and managing director of Horizon Partners, a boutique technology mergers-and-acquisitions firm, said many deals clinched by the five technology companies likely fell below the FTC’s threshold for review, and that in many cases the aim was to buy technology or engineering staff, rather than a stand-alone business that could flourish like YouTube or WhatsApp. Many recent deals by Facebook and other tech giants have been in artificial intelligence, an area where tech companies are increasing their investment.

Mr. Kory said it was hard to see an antitrust case against major tech companies snapping up small, unproven businesses so they can hire engineers well-versed in cutting-edge technology. “It’s uncharted territory to say, ‘You have too many smart people at your company.’” Scrutiny from Washington already is forcing changes in how Silicon Valley does business. At Facebook, CEO Mark Zuckerberg has formed a sizable team within the company to develop dozens of new apps because he isn’t confident the social-media giant could get significant acquisitions approved by regulators in the near term, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The company has previously had great success in turbocharging its growth through timely acquisitions of competitors, including Instagram for about \$1 billion and WhatsApp for \$22 billion. In Alphabet’s earnings report last week, CEO Sundar Pichai nodded toward divestitures of some of the conglomerate’s outlying arms, saying he expected them to take on outside investors. In addition to scrutinizing possible antitrust concerns involving certain major firms, the FTC said in early 2019 that it was creating a task force to examine potential antitrust violations across the tech industry. The FTC has been particularly focused on mergers that already have been approved by the government. That re-examination could eventually lead the FTC to try to unwind deals that it finds having anticompetitive effects now, officials have said. — *Wall Street Journal*

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Pennsylvania is launching the website where voters for the first time can request the newly legalized mail-in ballots ahead of the state's April 28 primary election, officials said Tuesday. The mail-in ballots, part of an election reform law signed in October by Gov. Tom Wolf, now allow all voters to vote by mail for any reason. The website was live as of Tuesday.

Online applicants must supply a driver's license number or an identification card number issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, as well as their name, address, phone number and email address. Prospective voters can also use the site to apply for an absentee ballot, and they will be asked questions to determine whether they qualify for one. Those questions include whether they will be traveling on the election day or whether they are ill or have a physical disability that prevents them from voting in person.

The deadline for county election offices to receive applications is 5 p.m. April 21. The deadline for county election offices to receive a mail-in or absentee ballot in the coming primary election is when polls close, or 8 p.m. April 28. Voters can also download and print the application and mail it to their county election office, or apply in person.

Wolf pushed for the new mail-in ballots as a way to get more people to vote. However, some county election offices are warning that they do not have enough staff to count all of the mail-in ballots on election nights. Wolf's top election official, Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar, has said her agency is working with county election officials and studying counting procedures used in the about 30 other states that allow votes by mail. Ballots may not be finalized until several weeks before the April 28 primary election, and will be mailed out after that, officials say. The deadline for candidates for office to file petitions to get on the ballot is Tuesday, Feb. 25 is the deadline to file a court challenge to a candidate's petitions and March 5 is the deadline for a candidate to withdraw their name from the ballot, although court challenges may drag on past that date. — **Associated Press**

