

## **EXPERTS: OLDER AMERICANS SHOULD TAKE 3 STEPS NOW TO BENEFIT FROM “CELL PHONE SECURITY BLANKET EFFECT” IN ACCIDENT, HEALTH AND CRIME SITUATIONS**

***Elderly Less Likely to Have Cell Phones, But May Benefit Most From Emergency Use Benefits Now Being Experienced by Other Americans; Inexpensive Prepaid Cell Phones Seen as Remedy for Tight Budgets.***

**WASHINGTON, D.C. – July 23, 2008** – While almost half of Americans (48 percent) already have used their cell phones in emergency situations, millions of U.S. senior citizens – who might benefit the most from the technology – are not yet taking advantage of the “cell phone security blanket effect,” due, in part, to a lack of awareness about such low-cost options as prepaid cell phones.

The Seniors Coalition and Nicholas P. Sullivan today outlined the three things every senior – or the child of an aging parent who may be reluctant to use new technology – should know about when it comes to prepaid and other cell phones. Sullivan is a researcher and the author of a March 2008 study based on more than 110,000 interviews with cell phone users who were asked about emergency/safety use of wireless phones.

Older Americans are among those least likely to have cell phones. Research published earlier this year by Sullivan shows that 38 percent of America’s 45 million poorest households -- including millions of seniors – are now without cell phones. According to the Sullivan report, those who do not now own a cell phone tend to be older (37 percent are retired) and low income (38 percent make less than \$35,000 a year).

Unlike many seniors, younger Americans are benefiting from the “cell phone security blanket effect.”

Sullivan’s report shows that about half of Americans (48 percent) have used their phone to call or text during an emergency situation, and a fifth (20 percent) have received an emergency call or text on their cell phone. Nearly three out of five Americans (58 percent) say if they had to choose only one phone, it would be a cell phone rather than a landline phone. When asked to choose the most important phone in an emergency situation, Americans now favor cell phones over landlines by a more than three-to-one margin. In one encouraging sign for seniors, nearly a third (32 percent) have bought a cell phone ... often an inexpensive prepaid phone ... for a child, parent or other relative to use in emergency situations.

The three points outlined by The Seniors Coalition about older consumers and how they can make the most of the “cell phone security blanket effect” are as follows:

1. **“Wear” your cell phone whenever it is not being charged.** A cell phone that is stowed away in your car’s glove compartment or always sitting in a recharging stand by your door isn’t going to do you any good if you fall down the basement stairs or get mugged in an alley. Get in the habit of keeping your cell phone on your person all day long – except for when it is being charged once or twice a week, preferably on a regular schedule. Remember: The only cell phone that does you any good is the one you can get to when you need it!
2. **Pre-program your cell phone – or your parent’s cell phone -- with key numbers – including home, doctor, pharmacist, and adult child/other family contact.** Make sure that you know how to find these pre-programmed numbers in your cell phone and then how to place a call using a pre-programmed number. Add “ICE” (**In Case of Emergency**) to these saved numbers that you will want emergency responders, police or others to call if you – or your older parent -- is in trouble, e.g. ICE Doctor; ICE Pharmacy; and ICE Family Contact.
3. **Beat high “contract” cell phone prices with an inexpensive prepaid phone.** Everyone is on a budget these days, but that’s no reason for a senior – or the adult child of an older parent – to miss out on the “cell phone security blanket effect.” Many seniors are opting to use low-cost pre-paid phones that allow them to buy a cell phone for as little as \$15 and then use pre-purchased minutes

for \$20 or less for three months, versus a wireless contract plan that can cost \$30-\$40 *per month* ... or even more.

“Grandma” Flora Green, national spokesperson, The Seniors Coalition, said: **“It’s easy for older Americans to put the ‘cell phone safety blanket effect’ to work for them. In some cases, it can literally make a life-or-death difference in the case of an accident or a case of crime. Older Americans and their adult children owe it to themselves to get an inexpensive prepaid or other cell phone and then to use it as a literal lifeline in emergency situations.”**

Nicholas Sullivan said: **“The data show that older Americans arguably are the group that could benefit the most from the ‘cell phone safety blanket effect.’ Seniors are the most prone to suffer dangerous accidents in the home and are prime targets for certain types of crime. Clearly, the often high cost of post-paid (also known as contract) cell phones is a major stumbling block for older Americans and the parents of older children. That means prepaid cell phones are going to be the most logical way for millions of older Americans to live safer.”**

For more information about the March 26, 2008 Sullivan report on cell phones and safety/economic issues, go to [http://newmillenniumresearch.org/archive/Sullivan\\_Report\\_032608.pdf](http://newmillenniumresearch.org/archive/Sullivan_Report_032608.pdf) on the Web.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** A streaming audio recording of a related news event will be available on the Web as of 4 p.m. EDT on June 23, 2008 at <http://www.411onwireless.org/newsmedia>.

### **ABOUT THE EXPERTS**

The Seniors Coalition (<http://www.senior.org>) is a non-profit, 501(c)(4), non-partisan, education and issue advocacy organization that represents the interests and concerns of America’s senior citizens at both the state and federal levels. Its mission is to protect the quality of life and economic well-being that older Americans have earned while supporting common sense solutions to the challenges of the future. The Coalition was founded as a public advocacy group during the fight to repeal the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act in 1989. Since then, it has grown rapidly and expanded our advocacy to include a wide range of other important issues.

Nicholas P. Sullivan is the author of a March 2008 study based on more than 110,000 interviews with prepaid and other cell phone users who were asked about emergency/safety use of wireless phones. The Sullivan report is the first in the U.S. to zero in on potential economic and public safety benefits to those in the bottom two quintiles of household income (less than \$35,000), who are much less likely to own cell phones. Sullivan also wrote the 2007 book *“You Can Hear Me Now: How Microloans and Cell Phones Are Connecting the World’s Poor to the Global Economy”*.

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