

what3words for Emergencies

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Why might I need the what3words app in an emergency?

Emergencies can happen anywhere, at any time day or night and often in unfamiliar places. This can make describing your location very difficult if you need to call 999. Having a precise location can help emergency services find you much faster, and what3words is a way for you to describe your location, accurate to 3x3m square, using just 3 words. These 3 words can then be shared with and used by emergency services, to find you easily.

What is what3words?

what3words is a really simple way to talk about location. It has divided the world into 3m x 3m squares, each with a unique 3 word address.

It means that now everyone, everywhere can refer to any precise location – from a specific building entrance to a point on a hiking trail or a remote spot in a field – using just three words. what3words is available as a free mobile app for iOS and Android and works offline. It is also available at map.what3words.com.

what3words is global. It is available in 27 different languages, with more in development.

How does the app work?

what3words uses GPS signal to convert GPS coordinates to 3 word addresses.

To find your 3 word address or one of a location near you:

- Open the what3words app or map.what3words.com and tap the 'current location' arrow.
- Enable location services if prompted.
- The 3 word address will appear:
 - In the what3words app: at the bottom of the screen.
 - In the what3words website: at the centre of the screen.

To find the 3 word address for another location:

- Enter its street address into the search bar.
- A 3 word address will appear at the bottom of the screen in the app, and in the centre of the screen on the online map.
- To improve accuracy, zoom and move the map to reposition the square.
- To identify the 3 word address of an exact location, switching to satellite view is recommended.
- The 3 word address will update as you reposition the map. Once you have selected the exact location, note down or save the 3 word address.

For more instructions on using the app, check out our ['How to' videos on YouTube](#).

How does what3words work for emergency situations?

In an emergency situation, a person can find the 3 word address for their current location by opening the what3words app or visiting the link map.what3words.com in a browser window. They then click the 'current location' arrow in the top right of the screen and provide the 3 words given on screen to the 999 call handler.

Some forces in the UK have their control room systems enabled to allow the call handler to send the caller a text message with a link to map.what3words.com. The caller is then prompted to open this link and follow the steps above.

Has what3words already been used for emergency response and is it working?

Several emergency and rescue services across the UK are already beginning to use what3words, with training ongoing in more control rooms around the country. We suggest asking your local service if you're unsure.

Successful use cases have included:

- Road traffic accidents in rural areas
- Identifying location of someone who had fallen in a river
- Hikers who had got lost
- A victim of kidnapping was located safely
- Victim of a horse-riding accident in open country
- Reporting forest fire locations

In each of these instances, what3words made it easy for the emergency services to identify exactly where the incident was, and help was quickly dispatched to its precise location.

Do people need a Wifi signal or mobile data to use the app?

If you have the what3words app installed on your phone it works offline, so you can discover your 3 word address without Wifi or mobile data. The map might not download but the 3 word address will still be shown.

When people do not have the what3words app in an emergency, call-handlers from some forces can send a text message with a link to the what3words online map, which opens in a mobile internet browser. For this to work, the recipient would need Wifi or mobile data.

In the case of an emergency, to find your 3 word address easily and give emergency services your exact location, we recommend downloading the free what3words app

How is this better or different from just sharing a pin or using Automatic Mobile Location (AML)?

When they work, digital pins are a good method of passing location from a phone to another phone or computer. However when it comes to using them to coordinate emergency response - pins are difficult to describe, can't be committed to memory and pose challenges when trying to share with others who need to coordinate resources to the same location.

what3words therefore plays a vital role in the emergency services toolkit: allowing them to receive, write down and share locations with others like fire, ambulance and helicopter services.

How does what3words handle buildings of more than one floor, such as apartment blocks?

Most postal or address systems are designed to work in 2D. For example, ZIP codes or postal codes in the UK, or GPS coordinates, on which what3words is based. These systems always need additional information to specify height. For example, Flat 6, 5th floor, 12 Lonsdale Road, NW7 1PR. With a 3 word address, we recommend a similar approach: Flat 6, 5th floor, 12 Lonsdale Road, NW7 1PR ///table.lamp.chair

What happens if words sound the same or have variant spellings or plurals?

what3words has removed the majority of words that could get confused with each other, for example, 'sale and sail'. In addition, similar sounding 3 word addresses, like 'table.lamp.chair' and 'table.lamp.chairs' have been placed as far apart as possible, so that it's clear if a mistake has been made.

What happens if words are spelled or said incorrectly or in the wrong order?

what3words has an AutoSuggest system that detects errors in 3 word address entry by voice and text and intelligently suggests relevant 3 word addresses. The what3words system places similar sounding words or addresses very far apart across the world e.g. ///kite.chats.dine is in York, UK but ///kite.chat.dine is in Wyoming, USA. For emergency services who are using 3 word addresses they will be able to check the 3 word address by typing it into their app or map to ensure it makes sense to the country or county you are in.

Can you type a 3 word address into Google maps?

While a 3 word address cannot yet be typed straight into Google Maps, it is easy to find a 3 word address in the what3words app and then navigate to that destination via Google Maps or your preferred navigation app.

You can find out more information about what3words and its other uses at [what3words.com](https://www.what3words.com)