

# With New Features, Uber Makes A Strong Point About Safety

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Beginning this summer, texting your roommate to let her know you're headed home in an Uber will be much easier. So will calling 911 if you get in an accident. Both of these updates fall under a broad banner of new safety features Uber announced today.

This is the company's second major announcement this week: Yesterday, Uber unveiled an expansion of its bikeshare program, a new way to rent cars, and a partnership to pay for public transit from the app. Together, these updates signify the largest changes Uber has made since new CEO Dara Khosrowshahi took the reins in August 2017.

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The offerings launching this summer include a Safety Center, where you'll be able to find answers to questions about how drivers are screened; a way to directly contact 911 in case of an accident or anytime you feel unsafe during a ride; and a way to designate up to five "Trusted Contacts" who you can quickly and easily share your location with when taking a ride. The updates will roll out to drivers, too.

Additionally, Uber announced some changes to its driver screening processes, including plans to do additional criminal and motor vehicle checks and stay up to date on new offenses.

Finally, users in Denver may see an "emergency button", a tool Uber is piloting there. One tap of that button lets a rider or driver immediately send their location and trip details to a 911 dispatcher. While the process is not as streamlined for those without the pilot, you'll still see your exact location in the app when calling 911, making it easy to tell a dispatcher where you are. This is significant, since it's often challenging for 911 operators to get *accurate* information about where someone is calling from — especially in a moving vehicle — due to issues with cell tower triangulation.

In addition to proving useful when accidents occur, Khosrowshahi also expressed hope that the ease of calling 911 will serve as a form of prevention. "If it's a sexual predator, they're going to look for a dark corner," he said at an event announcing the updates today. "Our message to the world is that Uber has the lights on."

Khosrowshahi was speaking to the app. However, his words could also be interpreted as a strong statement about Uber's new direction under his guard. In the past, Uber has come under fire in lawsuits claiming the company failed to protect female riders and drivers. The new safety features could help encourage more women, who have expressed hesitation about driving at night because of safety concerns, to drive during those peak hours. This could go a long way in helping female Uber drivers close the existing gender pay gap.

After a troubling year full of sexual harassment claims and upper leadership turnover, it's encouraging to see the ridesharing app instituting change that speaks to the issues at hand.

