

This section provides an overview of the considerations, techniques and protocols when handling emergency telephone calls and SMS text messages.

Related Links

Personal Data

Personal Data

Call Priority

Emergency calls in the UK can be made by dialing either 999 or 112. For the sake of clarity, such calls will hereinafter be referred to as 999 calls

999 calls have priority over all other calls both in the Call Handling Agent (CHA) exchanges and in emergency service co-ordination centres to which the calls are passed. The calls will normally be received on one of a zone's Primary 999 lines, dedicated solely for this category of call, but they may also be received from a neighbouring zone's 999 line - see Handling "Overflow" Calls below.

A 999 call indicates that someone is reporting an emergency situation and is likely to need immediate assistance

All emergency calls must be investigated and acted upon until the reported incident has been successfully dealt with, or determined that no assistance was required. If the call is suspected as being a hoax, SMCs must take every measure to satisfy themselves that no one would be at risk if the call is terminated and the incident closed

Telephone Manner

Answering a 999/112 call must take priority over all routine work. These calls must be answered within 10 seconds to meet PECS guidelines and the officer taking the call must be calm and prepared. It is essential that emergency calls are answered in a positive manner. The informant must be assured that the officer taking the call appreciates the urgency of the situation and will take action quickly and effectively

Answering an Emergency Call

The CHA operator will route a 999/112 call to the appropriate co-ordination centre without informing the caller of the geographical location of the co-ordination centre

The correct answering response to an emergency call received at an Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC)

“Coastguard Rescue”

If the full geographical name of the co-ordination centre is stated, the caller may become confused by the location

Silent Calls

If, after a dialogue has begun between a 999/112 caller and the MRCC, the call subsequently goes silent, the SMC must take appropriate action to re-establish contact, particularly if the caller is on a mobile phone. The call may be a hoax, but it may also be genuine and the reason for the silence is for example because of loss of signal, low battery, or the caller at sea having to take to the water

Every effort should be made to re-establish contact, including contacting the CHA, to locate the caller. The call should not be dismissed until the SMC is

content beyond reasonable doubt that the call was malicious or that life is not at risk

Questioning Technique

Initial Information Gathering

The informant may or may not be familiar with the local area, or know what sort of information is required by the SAR authorities

They should be given the opportunity to first explain the situation in their own words. When they have explained the situation you can fill in any additional information

When the nature of the incident becomes apparent, SAR action can be initiated whilst continuing to gather information

Questioning the Informant

When a full report of the casualty has been obtained from the informant, there may well be a need to clarify and confirm statements made and to perhaps ask for additional information

There is no advantage in terminating the call quickly. On the contrary, the informant should be encouraged to stay on the line or by the telephone as appropriate, until a CG unit arrives

Leading Questions

Great care must be exercised when questioning the informant. They must not be led into making statements that are not in fact correct. Well meaning suggestions by the CG officer may be grasped by the casualty and confirmed by him, thus changing an assumption into a fact

Example:

Informant	"I saw a red flare about 10 minutes ago"
CG	"Where were you when you saw the flare?"
Informant	"Up on the headland"
CG	"Would that be Redland Point?"
Informant	"Yes, I think that's what it's called"

The CG assumption that the flare is off Redland Point has been confirmed by the informant and action will now be based on that fact

Response Considerations

Responses should be based on sound factual knowledge. Assumptions should only be made when the facts are not available

Example:

Informant	“A young boy is in difficulty on the cliffs”
CG	“Has he fallen and is he injured?”
Informant	“No, he’s cut off by the tide at the bottom of the cliff”

Considered Response: A cliff rescue team may be appropriate

CG	“Is the boy in any imminent danger?”
Informant	“Yes, he’s clinging to a narrow ledge and may fall into the sea”

Considered Response: Scramble a helicopter as immediate rescue is required

It is impossible to respond correctly to an incident without first gathering the relevant information. Response must be based on sound professional assessment of the facts, and not be influenced by emotional reaction. The distressed state of the caller should not impair the measured judgement of the officer receiving the emergency call

Handling 'Overflow' Calls

Each of the national network operational zones (1 - 36) on ICCS have the capability of receiving 3 primary 999 telephone calls concurrently from the CHA. These primary lines are used by the CHA to connect a 999/112 caller to

the appropriate operations centre. These primary lines are used exclusively for receiving 999 calls and will trigger an audible alarm on ICCS.

After a fourth concurrent 999 call is received for a zone and the three other primary lines for a zone are busy, it will be re-routed to the neighbouring zones three primary 999 lines.

After a seventh concurrent 999 call is received for a zone it will be diverted and presented nationally to all zones on ICCS with the tag "UK 999". This means the 999 call can come from anywhere in the national network.

When answering a "UK 999" call, you must carry out information gathering, take all details and create an incident. Be patient while trying to contact the operations centre responsible for the incident zone for a handover.

More information on these processes is available at Phone - Emergency Network

Misrouted Calls

It is unlikely but possible that a 999/112 call is passed by the Call Handling Agent operator to the wrong operations centre, or even to the wrong emergency service

Calls to the Wrong Operations Centre

If a 999 call is received that has obviously been put through to the wrong operations centre:

- log incident like any other emergency call
- give a handover to the appropriate operations centre

Calls to the Wrong Emergency Service

If a 999 call is received that was meant for another emergency service

- try and attract the operator's attention verbally - in some cases they may still be monitoring the call
- If not, ring the 24 hour number of the appropriate CHA and request that the call is passed to the appropriate authority
- complete and send [[HYPERLINK](https://mcga.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/CIP-RefMaterial/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7b015EDA49-F594-4929-)
"https://mcga.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/CIP-RefMaterial/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7b015EDA49-F594-4929-

8D03-

90A093BCDB20%7d&file=999%20or%20112%20Misroute%20or%20Problem%20Report.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true&cid=98bf1df2-2cc5-4266-b8ff-bf0507ed261a" \t "_blank" \o

"https://mcga.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/CIP-

RefMaterial/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B015EDA49-F594-4929-8D03-

90A093BCDB20%7D&file=999%20or%20112%20Misroute%20or%20Problem%20Report.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true&cid=98bf1df2-2cc5-4266-b8ff-bf0507e"], found in the PECS code of practice, Appendix 8 and

send to SO Comms

Emergency Calls Received on Non 999/112 Lines

All emergency services at times receive emergency related calls that are not made on the 999 network and the Investigatory Powers Act (2016) allows limited access to such data under certain circumstances

Calls can be made using a non 999 line possibly because the caller did not consider the call an emergency but which subsequently proves to be an emergency situation. As long as you can obtain all the relevant information you need from the caller and you are content with the authenticity of the call, no problems should arise. However, if you do have any doubt as to the authenticity of the call, the connection is lost, or following the release of the caller you need to call back, ICCS and VISION can be used to obtain the number from which the call was made.

This does not however provide the name, address or location of the caller. CHAs cannot routinely provide you with this information because of Data Protection Act restrictions. To obtain further information, you will have to follow procedures under the Obtaining Communications Data procedure

999 Text Messages

Emergency SMS Text Messages

A 999 SMS (Short Message Service) texting service, emergency SMS, is available for use by those who are deaf or profoundly hard of hearing and also to those who are speech impaired

Users of the service have to register their mobiles (or land line handsets if capable of sending an SMS message) to allow a text message to be sent using the simple familiar three digit 999 number. Anyone can register their telephone, but all marketing is aimed at the deaf and hearing/speech impaired

communities. Users are not required to give address details or information about their condition

The service is an add-on to the existing 999 and 18000 services that are available in the UK

For examples of a 999 text message format and content, see 'Sending a text to 999' on the emergency SMS website

How It Works

A user's SMS text message is connected to the 999 network through the Text Relay 18000 service

The technology involved in processing voice and text telephone messages is different in a number of respects but the two systems have been interfaced to enable a text message to be sent by a caller and received as a voice message complete with location information

Once sent, the message has to be converted from text message telephone signal to a voice type signal - translated and passed to TextDirect - the message is converted into a voice message and passed to the 999 operator and then to the appropriate emergency authority on a standard 999 line

Taking the call

A 999 SMS message will come through on a normal 999 line, however, the first informant/casualty will not be on the other end

The BT operator will say:

"999 [centre] connecting ESMS message from 077xx xxxxxx [caller's phone number]"

□ You will not receive EISEC or AML information from this service.

A text relay advisor will then take over the call and verbalise the message.

The text message may include:

- which - emergency service required
- what - a brief description of the problem
- where - location (e.g. location name, landmarks etc.)
- enhancing info - if available

The Operator will then ask you if you want to reply.

How to reply

Ensure your reply requests the information you would gain from the 6Ws questioning technique. If this is not possible, ask the operator to text back asking single questions from the 6Ws to gather the information you need. This can be a time consuming process so be aware that it removes you and the BT operator from the 999 service.

The BT operator will compose and send the message you requested and wait for the casualty to reply. After the casualty has replied the BT operator will again verbalise the message they have sent back and ask you how you wish to reply. This process can go back and forward as many times as required to get all the information or for as long as the casualty replies. After you have all the information required you can ask the operator to disconnect the call.

□ Ensure you have gathered all the information required because after the call disconnects you cannot use the ESMS service to restart comms via SMS with the caller.

Limitations

This service has limitations and these will be made clear to all users when they register to use the service. There can be delays in the time it takes a text call to be delivered and a text message cannot be prioritised. A text call is not an open line, therefore, if the emergency service call taker for example needs to get back to the caller, a new message has to be sent using the reverse of the process described above

Coastguard officers will need to be aware of the significance of the call not being an open line. If further information is needed from the caller, consider carefully all relevant questions and send them together in one return text message

Other Text Calls

There is the potential for receiving emergency calls by text, either as a text message or one that has been converted into a voice message using an electronically generated voice text message. The technology exists to link a GPS position into a preformatted text to be sent in an emergency. Such calls, accidentally and unknown to the user, have already been generated and received at MRCCs. If the caller fails to pick up a reply from the MRCC, the situation is compounded

It is important to dissuade anyone from using this communications medium as a sole means of emergency communications. Such traffic cannot be prioritised and whereas text messages can be processed immediately they can also be stacked for up to 24 hours

If you are unable to contact the caller, contact the Communications Provider using the Obtaining Communications Data procedure to determine an address and try and find a landline number to commence enquiries from that point

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