

# VoIP services must provide free emergency calls

**The emergency call service arrangements are an important public safeguard. To reassure consumers about access to these services as new and innovative telecommunications services are introduced, ACMA has proposed amendments to the regulatory obligations of service providers.**

The proposed changes confirm the obligation to provide free-of-charge access to emergency call services for 'two-way' and 'dial-out only' voice over internet protocol (VoIP) services.

Many VoIP providers already provide free-of-charge access to the triple zero (000) emergency call service number and these proposals clarify that the obligation applies to all VoIP services capable of dialling

into the public telephone network.

ACMA is also proposing that VoIP services must be flagged in the Integrated Public Number Database (IPND) so that the emergency call service operator will know to ask the caller for location information. The IPND is a national database of all listed and unlisted public telephone numbers, customer name and address information and the name of the

customer's service provider.

The emergency call service is an operator-assisted service designed to connect callers to an emergency service in a life-threatening or time critical situation. ACMA regulates the emergency call service through the *Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Determination 2002*.

Australia's primary emergency call service number is 000, which can be dialled from any fixed or mobile phone. There are two secondary emergency call service numbers: 112, which is available from all GSM mobile phones, and 106, which connects to the text-based relay

service for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. All calls to the emergency numbers, whether from fixed, mobile or payphones, are free of charge.

The emergency call services that initially handle the calls are operated by emergency call persons (ECPs). ACMA's *Telecommunications (Emergency Call Person) Determination 1999* specifies Telstra as the ECP for 000 and 112, and the Australian Communication Exchange Ltd as the ECP for 106.

The emergency call service operator determines from the caller which emergency service—ambulance, fire brigade or police—is required and establishes the location of the caller through information from the IPND and from the caller. The operator then switches the call to the pre-nominated answer point for the requested emergency service organisation.

The changes to the *Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Determination 2002* are aimed at reinforcing the critical importance of providing free-of-charge access to emergency call services for services using new technologies. They were recommended by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts in its November 2005 report on *Examination of Policy and Regulation relating to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Services*.

The proposed changes were released in a consultation paper and draft amendment to the determination. Comments closed on 2 July 2007. The paper and draft amendment are on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) (go to For licensees & industry: Licensing & regulation > Telecommunications: Telecommunications regulation > Voice over internet protocol (VoIP) > Emergency Call Service and VoIP Services).

