

Proposed new rules set to improve location information for Triple Zero mobile calls

The location of people calling Triple Zero from their mobile phones will be easier to trace under improved location information provisions proposed by the ACMA.

In early May, the ACMA released a consultation paper on its proposal to amend emergency call service rules. The new rules will mean mobile carriers will have to provide emergency service organisations with all location information available in association with a genuine emergency call.

‘Mobile phone calls now account for around 63 per cent of all calls made to Triple Zero. This is not well appreciated, but unlike landline phones, emergency calls from mobile phones don’t automatically give emergency operators accurate details about a caller’s whereabouts,’ said Chris Chapman, Chairman of the ACMA.

This is not an issue for the vast majority of mobile calls made to Triple Zero as in most cases the caller can tell the emergency operator where they are located. But there are times—estimated at less than one per cent of calls—when people are too distressed or unfamiliar with their environment to report their location. It is in such instances where access to enhanced location information will assist emergency service organisations to locate callers.

The consultation paper addresses the following key issues:

- > mandating the provision of best available location information about a mobile emergency call on request from an emergency service organisation
- > identifying the operational arrangements for implementing an enhanced mobile location solution
- > managing unrealistic expectations of the provision of mobile location information in an effort to correct the belief some people have that current mobile location identification techniques can provide ‘pinpoint’ accuracy anywhere in Australia
- > determining a temporary exemption process to give carriers reasonable time to upgrade their technology where required.

‘The ACMA is concerned that the community may have unrealistic expectations about the current ability of mobile technology to help them in an emergency situation—for example, a recent ACMA survey found that 52 per cent of people believe they can be located automatically via a mobile phone,’ said Mr Chapman.

‘This is not the case. There is currently no single and widely available method that can accurately pinpoint a mobile phone user’s location and then pass the information to emergency operators. Such accuracy is not expected to be made available on a reasonable cost basis for some years to come and will always be difficult in a country with the land mass and sparse population of Australia.’

The ACMA recognises that enhancing the level of mobile location information available to the emergency call service is only one component of improving public safety. Raising community awareness about Triple Zero, the limitations of mobile location technology and the use of other mobile safety devices such as personal locator beacons is equally important.

To better inform the community on these issues, the ACMA has also released a study into whether there is an appropriate and consistent mobile location solution for Australia’s emergency call service that cost-effectively meets demonstrated needs.

‘While the evidence in this report confirms that currently there is no single solution to the provision of mobile location information, the ACMA is nonetheless moving to ensure that the Australian community benefits from the most up-to-date location technologies that can be reliably provided to Australia’s emergency service organisations,’ said Mr Chapman.

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Submissions

Submissions to the consultation paper will be used to inform the drafting process of formal amendments to the Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Determination 2009.

Submissions to the paper close on **18 June 2010**.

The ACMA sees the outcome of this work as an important next step in continuing to improve the delivery of mobile location information to enhance the emergency call service.

To access a copy of the mobile location information study and consultation paper, visit the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to About ACMA: News and Media Centre > Issues for comment > IFC12/2010).

