

Personal alert devices and the National Emergency 000 call service

On 30 October 2009 ASIAL wrote to police forces around Australia requesting clarification of their views and consequent response procedures with respect to programmable and/or automated personal alert devices, such as portable personal medical and/or duress alarms.

This was in response to concerns raised by Members at promotional material produced by CareAlert, a South Australia-based supplier of personal alarms under the product name Smart Dialler.

Specifically, this material confirmed that the device was capable of being programmed by the user to automatically dial the National Emergency Number, 000.

Having regard to the gravity with which the relevant legislation (the Commonwealth *Criminal Code Act 1995*, Section 474.18) reflects the seriousness of inappropriate use of the 000 Line, ASIAL was concerned that all devices capable of accessing this number, and not only monitored security systems, complied, and were promoted in compliance with, this legislation.

Police responses received to ASIAL's letter, which raised the CareAlert example, were unanimous on the following points:

- Police and other emergency services agencies have not been approached by the supplier in regard to their response to its product.
- Police agencies do not respond to personal alert devices of any kind.
- Police agencies, and emergency services organisations in general, do not endorse products of this nature.
- Police agencies believe that the ability of personal alert devices to be programmed to dial 000 automatically has the potential to cause connectivity and call allocation concerns within the National emergency call service provider (currently Telstra).

In addition Victoria Police has contacted Victorian Ambulance and Fire authorities and confirmed they hold the same position. Further, ASIAL is advised Ambulance Victoria has independently contacted the CareAlert supplier requesting clarification of its claims, and remains dissatisfied with the response.

ASIAL's correspondence was subsequently raised at the biannual meeting of the National Emergency Communications Working Group (NECWG) in Hobart in November.

Following this meeting NECWG, which regulates emergency call services to Ambulance, Fire and Police agencies Nationally, wrote to ASIAL on 27 November 2009 expressing 'extreme concern that people's lives and property were being put at risk' as a result of some of the claims being made by some personal alert device suppliers in their promotional material, and referring specifically to those made by CareAlert.

NECWG requested that ASIAL:

1. Ensure its Members are aware of the appropriate use of the 000 facility and the consequences of misuse (which under the *Criminal Code Act* can include penalties extending to 3 years imprisonment).
2. Take action to have the CareAlert supplier 'desist from making such claims unless it can provide formal evidence of such formal testing and clearance'. Consequent to this request, ASIAL wrote to CareAlert accordingly on 8 December 2009.

ASIAL has also issued a Media Statement on this issue. From a regulatory perspective, NECWG has indicated it will in 2010 address the issue of establishing a National compliance protocol for personal alert devices.