

Road safety: the eCall system to citizens, 2nd communication eSafety

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PURPOSE: To present a Communication calling for urgent action on the pan-European in-vehicle emergency call, known as eCall.

CONTENT: This Report works alongside the i2010 Communication on 'A European Information Society for Growth and Employment', the purpose of which is to outline a strategy on preparing the EU for information technology developments by the year 2010. One particular feature of the strategy is transport and how information technology can improve this vital element of the EU's economy. A flagship initiative under the Transport Chapter of the i2010 Communication is devoted to the establishment of 'The Intelligent Car'. Linked to the concept of the Intelligent Car is a pan-European in-vehicle emergency call, known as eCall, to which this present Communication is devoted.

With over 43 000 road fatalities in the EU's 25 Member States in 2004 the Commission suggests that a more pro-active engagement on road safety issues is needed if the trend in road fatality statistics is to be bucked. Further, with the EU having committed itself to reducing road accident deaths from 43 000 to 25 000 by the year 2010, a more active approach to curbing car accidents is essential. One step towards achieving this goal could be the deployment of the pan-European in-vehicle emergency call. It works thus: In case of an accident, the eCall device in the car will transmit an emergency call that automatically goes to the nearest emergency service. It can be triggered manually. Alternatively, in cases of a severe accident, the car can send an automatic distress call. The life saving feature of eCall is the accurate information it provides on the location of the accident site with the emergency services being notified immediately so that they know exactly where to go. This results in a drastic reduction in the rescue time. When medical care for severely injured people is available at an earlier time after the accident, the death rate and severity of trauma resulting from the injuries can be significantly reduced - alternatively known as the 'Golden Hour Principle' of accident medicine.

In line with the development of eCall an EU Driving Group has been established with a view to producing a framework business model for eCall and to define the roles for both the public and private stakeholders. The Driving Group has produced a Memorandum of Understanding, in which it binds stakeholders to implement eCall on the basis of common approved standards and interface specifications, including the Minimum Set of Data. Accordingly, a Road Map for eCall has been defined whereby the following principles have been agreed:

- To agree an eCall roll-out plan, business model and standards by the end of 2005.
- To establish full specifications of the in-vehicle eCall system. Development is to begin by mid 2006.
- To complete full scale field tests with early adaptors in 2007.
- To introduce eCall as a standard equipment in all vehicles entering the market after September 2009.
- For the eCall technology to work, the EU emergency services will need to equip their PSAPs with the new technology thus allowing them to process eCall location reports. The Commission proposes this be done by the end of 2007.

Key to the realisation of the eCall, however, is the active participation of the Member States. Without their involvement it will be impossible to standardise the technology so that it can be read by all of the EU's emergency services and recognised by all cars using the EU's road network.

To complement these measures, therefore, the Commission calls on the Member States to:

- Sign the MoU.
- Promote the emergency number 112 or E112
- Upgrade their PSAPs allowing them to handle location-enhanced E112 calls and eCalls.
- Provide adequate location-enhanced emergency services and language support.

The Commission concludes its report by noting that technologies and systems can and do save lives. In addition, they reduce the severity of injuries caused by road accidents. The challenge now is to ensure the large-scale deployment of eCall across the EU. The technology exists - and it is now up to the Member States to invest in the necessary infrastructure. Upgrading the emergency services comes with a cost, but the estimated benefit-cost ratio is considered extremely positive. The Commission, therefore, calls for an immediate Member State response to the Communication's recommendations. The Commission will follow progress closely. Should there be no further movement on the eCall initiative in line with the Road Map summarised above the Commission will consider other measures.