

EU emergency number secret to many

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BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP) - The European Commission **AP** Associated Press urged EU governments Thursday to better advertise 112 -- the EU-wide emergency phone number that has been around since 1991 but remains barely known.

The EU executive released the findings of a survey that found only 22 percent of EU citizens can "spontaneously identify 112" as the number to dial for emergency help anywhere in the 27-nation bloc.

Launched in 1991, the number is meant to get help in life-threatening situations, from fires to armed robberies to significant injuries or medical emergencies.

But telecoms operators have been slow to make the call of free of charge or provide caller location data that would enable emergency services to find accident or crime victims, as required by EU law.

The European Commission has taken legal action to force more than a dozen EU states to ensure that network operators provide caller location details. Seven have done so by now but that data is still unavailable in Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. In Bulgaria, 112 is not available at all.

Prodded by the European Parliament, the European Commission made a new effort Monday urging EU governments to boost more public awareness of 112.

"An emergency number that functions effectively across the EU is a pivotal instrument for ensuring the safety of our citizens," said Viviane Reding, the EU Telecoms Commissioner.

"Citizens should be able to call the same emergency number wherever they are or travel in Europe."

The Eurobarometer survey found 95 percent of EU citizens believe a single emergency number would be useful and that one in four had a need to make an emergency call in the past five years.

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