

When in distress call 112

The single European number for emergencies

A road accident in Bilbao, Spain. An aggression in Bari, Italy. A fire in Edinburgh, Scotland. A near drowning in Rhodes, Greece. A heart attack in Malmö, Sweden. A fatal stroke in Munich, Germany. When travelling in Europe and you are in need of an ambulance, the police or the rescue services, please remember to call only one number – the 112. It is the single European emergency call number and functions for free from mobile as well as from fixed telephones. Even if you have subscribed to an international assistance service for travelers, calling the 112 (the European 911) is certainly the first move to get emergency help right away. It is almost sure that your international assistance company will ensure emergency help by calling the same number.

Established in 1991, the 112 has been implemented all over the European Union, even in the ten new Member States from Eastern and Central Europe, Malta and Cyprus which joined the Union in May 2004. According to the European Commission, the 112 has even been implemented as the single national emergency call number in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain. In the United Kingdom and Ireland calls to the 112 are automatically transferred to the 999, the single national emergency call number. The 112 is the call number of the firefighters / ambulances in Germany and of the Police in Italy. In the other EU countries calls to the 112 are transferred to the call center of one of the emergency services (Belgium, Austria, France) or to a specialized national call center for tourists (Greece). Furthermore, calls to the 112 are answered in several languages in Sweden, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Denmark, Greece and some regions of France and Spain. Emergency services can localize callers from fixed telephones in all EU countries while localization of calls from mobiles has been implemented only on a trial basis (e.g. in the London area).

It is evident from the above that the service you get by calling the 112 – or the national emergency numbers if you happen to know them – does not correspond to the same quality standards in the different countries. Furthermore, the law provides for minimum response times for emergency services,

only in some European countries and not in others. Portugal, the only country courageous enough to evaluate the quality of the complete 112 service chain, discovered that for 15% of calls in Portuguese and Spanish, for 29% of calls in English and for 20% of calls in French, emergency services never arrived at the place of the emergency! In fact the European Commission may issue directives for animal passports or hygiene rules for ear-piercing, but considers emergency services as being an exclusively national responsibility.

To better promote the knowledge and efficient use of the 112, all over Europe, a small group of interested volunteers created in 1999 the European Emergency Number Association (EENA), a non-profit association established in Belgium. EENA acts as a discussion platform bringing together all the actors (organizations, enterprises and individuals) involved with the development and implementation of the 112. EENA maintains a web site (www.eena.org), where citizens who faced a problem when calling the 112 (and survived ...) can introduce a complaint which the EENA transmits to the authorities in view of improving the 112 service chain. Since its creation EENA has introduced complaints against several countries for poor implementation of the 112 as well as a complaint to the European Ombudsman against the European Commission for failing to properly follow-up the situation with Member States.

So now you know what to do in an emergency. Above all do not call the 112 for a non-life threatening situation (or any other emergency call number). From the 185 million calls to emergency services in 2001, only 80 million were *real* emergencies – the rest were requests for information, people testing mobile phones children's play, etc. The burden to emergency services is often to great and hampers dealing properly with *real* emergencies.



Using the 112

When to call the 112

Call the 112 only in real life-threatening emergencies like:

- Serious medical problems (unconscious person, important injuries, chest pain, seizure, bleeding)
- Any type of fire (house, car, business)
- Life-threatening situations (crimes, fights, people with weapons, robbery in progress, etc)

Do not call the 112:

- To test your mobile phone – you may block a real life-threatening emergency call
- To laugh at the operators or to just hang up – respect operators who work under stress to help save lives, do not block real emergency calls by blocking lines
- For non life-threatening emergencies or non-emergencies like property damage accidents, break-in to vehicles, theft of property, vandalism – especially when the suspect is gone – cars blocking the street. Call directly the local police.
- However – when in doubt, dial it out – 112. You could save someone's life!

Stay calm

Stay safe – avoid having an accident yourself.

What to say

- Where is the assistance needed (location)
- Your name and telephone number
- What happened (nature of the emergency) and if it is happening now
- Who needs help or is involved and how many (victims, suspects, etc.)
- Why is the emergency happening (i.e. depression) and any obstacles to the arrival of emergency services
- Are weapons involved? (Knives, hand-guns, automatic weapons, suspected bombs or explosives)

Stay calm

Wait for instructions. And follow them carefully – your assistance could mean the difference between life, death or serious injury
Do not hang up until the operator tells you to!

Be prepared

- To launch a 112 call – observe and exercise mentally
- Get training in your company or in the context of your community as a first aid helper or as a first responder – you will be able to help yourself and your neighbours
- Remember – prevention is always better and more efficient.
- Report problems with the use of the 112 at www.eena.org