

Euro emergency number 'unknown'

By Stephen Mulvey
BBC News

Campaigners have demanded greater efforts to publicise the little-known European emergency number - 112.

The number is meant to put callers in contact with emergency services in all 27 EU member states, but in many of them it is reported to be unreliable.

More than two-thirds of Europeans are said to be unaware of its existence.

MEPs urged national governments and the European Commission to do more to promote the number, and to make it work effectively across the EU.

Liberal Democrat MEP Diana Wallis said that one in five British people were aware of the 112 number, compared with about 70% in Sweden.

Travellers' aid

"We need a pretty huge publicity campaign to get that percentage up," she told BBC News.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY NUMBERS

France: 17 (police), 15 (ambulance), 18 (fire)
Greece: 100 (police), 166 (ambulance), 199 (fire)
Italy: 113 (police), 118 (ambulance), 115 (fire)
Austria: 133 (police), 144 (ambulance), 122 (fire)
Poland: 997 (police), 999 (ambulance), 998 (fire)

Advertisements at ports and airports would be a good start, she said.

"Other states may have more awareness of the number, but may be less advanced in terms of being able to locate the caller or being able to answer calls in different languages," she said.

The number was first introduced in 1991 so that travellers in Europe would be able to dial just one number, rather than having to memorise a different one for each country.

If properly implemented, the number would save 5,000 lives per year, campaigners say.

They want sympathisers to sign an online petition requesting the European Commission "to ensure an efficient 112 service all over the EU".

Ms Wallis said the commission should carry out a study to determine how well 112 worked around the EU, and demand action from national governments where necessary.

'Good to publicise'

She admitted that she had not known about the number until she got involved in the campaign a couple of months ago.

A UK Foreign Office spokesperson said the 112 number was promoted in its advice to travellers visiting certain specific European countries, but not advertised as a Europe-wide emergency number.

"Anything that can make travel safer overseas for British nationals is something it would be good to publicise," he said.

Story from BBC NEWS:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/6336099.stm>

Published: 2007/02/06 16:39:17 GMT

© BBC MMVII