

Lifestyle

# What to do if you need to call 999 but can't talk

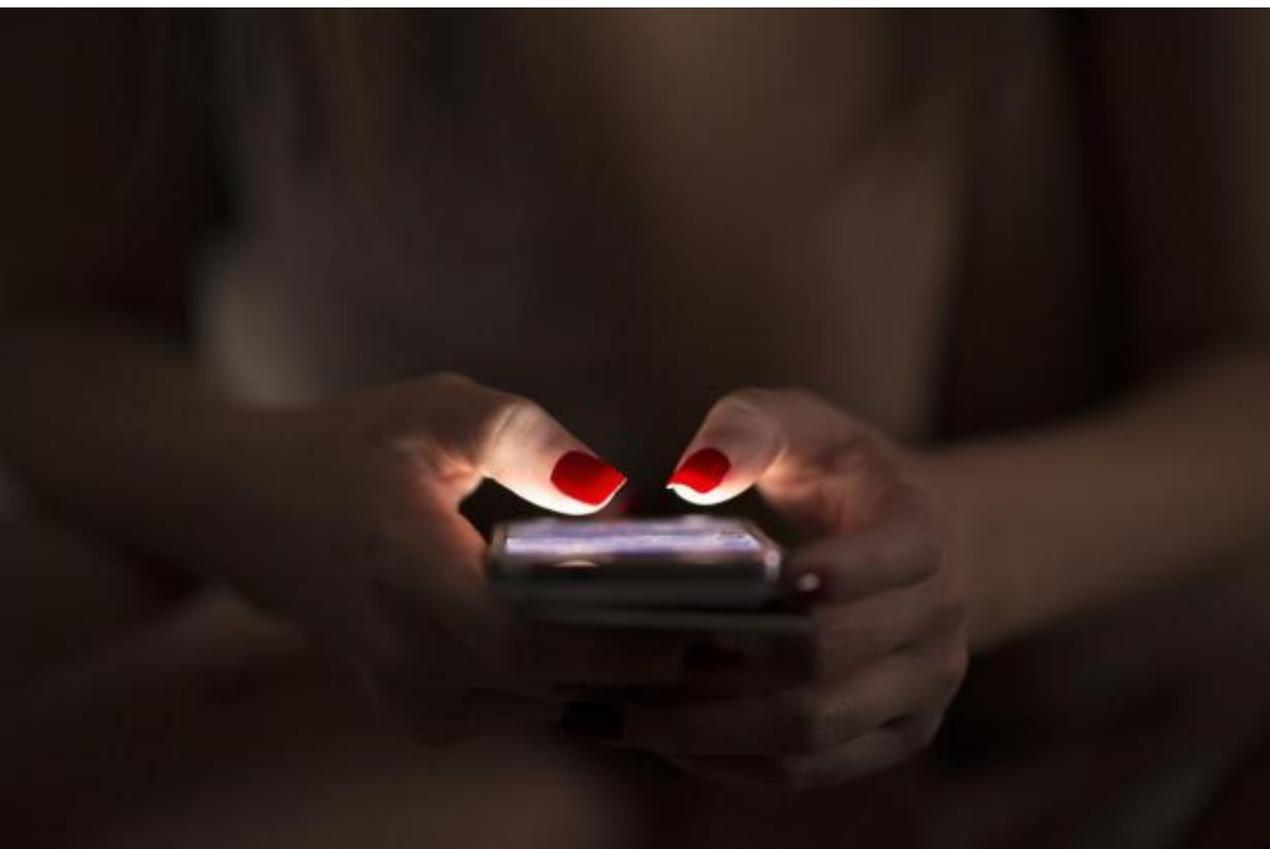
Alert the emergency services without putting yourself in any more danger

Rachel Hosie | @rachel\_hosie | Thursday 12 January 2017 |  45 comments



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There may come a time in everyone's life when you need to call the emergency services, but it might put you or those around you in even more danger by talking.

When you call 999, an operator asks which service you require. If you remain silent and it's an emergency, you'll be asked to cough or make some other audible sound without speaking.

But what are you supposed to do if making any noise at all might alert an attacker to your

presence and so you need to remain silent?



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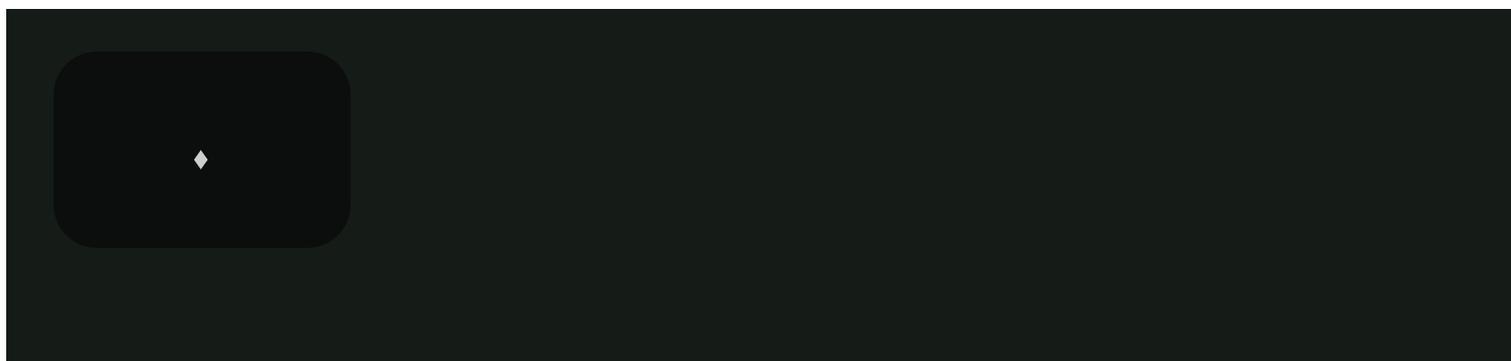
### **Dangerous driver called 999 to demand police stop chasing him**

The answer is to dial '55'.

Emergency services have previously announced that if they receive a 999 (or 112) call but hear nothing on the end of the line, they won't automatically investigate it.

But they've recently reiterated how those in an emergency can alert the police without making a sound.

The correct procedure is called Silent Solutions but very few people know it exists.



## Five 999 calls that have wasted police time

If after calling 999 you haven't been able to signal to the operator that your call is an emergency by coughing, you'll be put through to an operating system.

What you then have to do if you're in danger is dial '55', otherwise the call will be ended.



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### **Girl, 3, calls 999 after heavily-pregnant mother falls down stairs**

A police spokesperson said: "Please do not think that just because you dial 999 that police

will attend.

“We totally understand that sometimes people are unable or too afraid to talk, however it must be clear that we will not routinely attend a silent 999 call,” he explained to [the Express and Echo](#).

The reason is that the emergency services don’t know whether the call was made accidentally, perhaps after mis-dialling.

It is hoped that by spreading awareness of the procedure, the emergency services will be able to act more efficiently and save lives. ●

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 **Pinky Lee** 20 hours ago

 Please clarify; does one have to dial 999 first then wait to be prompted to dial 55, can one dial 55 direct?

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 **drlifecandy** 17 hours ago

 no, they pick up on the tone 55 makes when the call is live on 999

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 **rolands** 23 hours ago

I would have hoped that all 999 calls would get a visit. What about someone who has collapsed straight after dialling?

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 **JC** 22 hours ago

Do you have any idea how many silent 999 calls the emergency services receive every day? It is impossible for every one to receive a visit.

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**the\_great\_protector**

22 hours ago

are numbers still withheld when you make 999 calls  
does anyone know?

If not, a visit and hefty fine for time wasting would soon  
stop them

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+2 likes



**JC**

22 hours ago

No, they're not withheld. The big problem used  
to be public phone boxes, the callers would be  
long gone but now they tend to be unregistered  
mobile phones.

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0 likes



**gnarl**

23 hours ago

Essex Air Ambulance have an app that sends a six figure grid ref. A  
similar police app would be useful.

[http://www.essexairambulance.uk.com/news-  
events/news/download-our-free-app-and-help-save-a-life](http://www.essexairambulance.uk.com/news-events/news/download-our-free-app-and-help-save-a-life)

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**europanexus**

1 day ago

A bit like an intruder alarm going off and being told to call the local  
council environmental department. The first aim of the police  
should be to respond by default regardless as to what they find -  
granny chasing cats with a broom stick. Sitting in an office playing  
with computers and looking busy isn't what the police are meant to  
be doing. Getting out on the streets 85% of the time is more crucial.  
Presence is deterrence enough.

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-4 likes



**Seahorse70**

1 day ago

Good to know, if in a moment of panic I can remember to key in  
(not dial) 55 - possible I would remember 505 better (as looks like  
SOS).

Reply · Share · 3 replies

+6 likes



**Christopher Havard**

1 day ago

My first thought too. They missed a trick there.

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**drlifecandy**

17 hours ago

 if you can't remember two numbers you need the hospital anyway.

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0 likes  



**MeMarkyB**

2 hours ago

you are prompted to key 55 by the operator, you don't need to remember it

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0 likes  



**Nemo**

1 day ago

I have heard that there is a number to call from a smartphone that will reveal to the emergency operator the GPS co-ordinates of the caller. Anyone know if this is true and the number?

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+2 likes  



**Eric**

1 day ago

There's a bunch of work in progress to enhance emergency location procedures through a variety of mechanisms. The GPS functionality of a smart phone is obviously a key one. Look, for example, at the niccstandards website under "publications" for current guidelines or "current work" for making it all work on IP networks. - or search "emtel". There is a very important point to make here though: All the work that I am aware of sends all this location information off to the government agencies IRRESPECTIVE of whether you ask it to or not.

This is always justified as "it might save a life one day" (which it might) - But add it together with HMRCs "snooper computer" and the latest RIPA bill mandating that ISPs record all phone call metadata and every website visited by everyone in the country for 1 year and making it accesible, not just to the security services but also to 48 government departments from the FSA, through the Welsh ambulance service to ensuring that HMRC can take as much of the money that YOU earned as possible and we are already in a world that Stalin or Hitler would have had wet dreams about - all without even really questioning if just because we CAN do this - should a supposedly free country REALLY remove any and all privacy from it's citizens?

Reply · Share · 6 replies 

+5 likes  



**SaNagbalmuru**

1 day ago

Oh please. Move to some uninhabited valley and become an off-grid spoon-widdler if you really believe that. Let the rest of us get on with our lives free from this paranoia.

**Eric**

1 day ago

SaNagbalmuru,

Please feel free to become a "spoon-widdler"(?) if you really feel that that is the only alternative to living in an all-spying 1984 police state with no privacy.

Personally I'd rather see all this technology used for OUR benefit.

All I am saying is that while the opportunities offered by new technology are truly immense and exciting (which is why I've spent 25 years working in the high tech industry), it's abuse is currently out of control and OUR individual data should be controlled by the individual and NOT automatically taken and (ab)used by the state and BigCorp.

If an individual chooses to share their location/ID/phone records.... web history.... bank details... address/phone number - whatever - then that is great. But if they want it NOT to be simply taken by others for profit and/or the surveillance society - then that should be THEIR choice.

Reply · Share · 2 replies +3 likes  **ehw**

3 hours ago

You're in the high tech industry with such an illogical attitude?

The technology has been in place for a number of years to listen to conversations taking place between passengers on ships passing through the Straits of Gibraltar. Over the years that has led to the arrest of many terrorists in Spain, and you want to make it illegal.

I welcome my privacy being invaded if it saves a life.

Reply · Share · 1 reply 0 likes  **MeMarkyB**

2 hours ago

Why is it illogical not to want your location to be known to the huge list of organisations published in the 'snooper's charter'?

Opting in to that is useful, and desirable, it being the default is not.

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0 likes  



**ehw**

3 hours ago

As you now know many people see maintaining their privacy as being more important than saving lives. What have these people got to hide, I wonder.

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0 likes  



**MeMarkyB**

1 hour ago

No, that's a straw-man. Mission creep is inevitable, so the time comes when you can't get insurance because your family is predisposed to cancers? That's the sort of thing that we are not too keen on.

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0 likes  



**CallumFinlayson**

1 day ago

Also, remember that you can send SMS messages to 999 in the event of an emergency where you cannot speak -- but that you *\*must\** register for this in advance (text register to 999). Responses are typically received in about 1-2 minutes.

This capability is primarily intended for hearing- or speech-impaired people, but could serve a similar function in situations where someone has their phone but needs to be silent.

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+6 likes  



**Scrimcloth**

1 day ago

Am I right in thinking that any cell phone in the UK can be triangulated by the authorities to reveal the exact position in order for emergency services to respond? If so it implies an impressive surveillance organization and infrastructure.

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0 likes  



**wilson16**

1 day ago

Yes it can be done but I think not in real time.

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+2 likes  



**CallumFinlayson**

1 day ago

Not really, and certainly not in real time -- they're entirely dependent on the information the Communications Provider (typically the mobile network operator) provides, which will generally just be the cell ID -- which can cover quite a large area. There have been ongoing discussions, including an Ofcom consultation the year before last, about how CPs can provide accurate Emergency Caller Location Information, but certainly the emergency services can't triangulate calls the way it's depicted on TV, nor is there the "impressive surveillance organization" you suggest.

Reply · Share · 4 replies

+4 likes



**Scrimcloth**

1 day ago

So it is just another paperwork generator for the police and a 'no hoper' for the caller.

Reply · Share · 1 reply

-1 likes



**MeMarkyB**

1 hour ago

?

No, it is very useful.

Reply · Share

0 likes



**Eric**

1 day ago

This is only partially true.

See my post above on work that will make it realtime and for all calls.

And IMO - yes. the concerns about privacy are very valid. I believe you should , at a minimum, be allowed to turn it off.

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+4 likes



**MeMarkyB**

1 hour ago

Partly true, the blue-light organisations can't do this themselves, but they can get better location data than 'just' cell site ID, 3g & later technologies can also provide distance from cell site so, alongside 2g+ cell site triangulation they can be given pretty good location data.

Not good enough to id a house out of a street though, obviously.

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**crazydave789**

1 day ago

what you see on the TV is not so good in reality, you can triangulate so far but its similar to sat nav in that it is not so accurate and ties you to the nearest road.

using a phones GPS to relay information is another matter and can be accurate

Reply · Share · 1 reply

0 likes



**Eric**

1 day ago

(At least) one problem with using a mobile phone's GPS location for critical emergency location purposes is that quite often the GPS location is out of date (for example when the phone was last used in one country and then turned off during a flight then GPS not used/updated subsequently.

That is already leading to significant numbers of problems for the emergency response units and is in some ways worse than simply not having the location provided - then at least you KNOW you have to ask and/or determine location by more reliable means. There is a whole logic tree in the standards for this stuff.

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0 likes



**Fool-Britannia**

2 days ago

Don't forget, cell handsets will often connect you with emergency services even if you NO CREDIT. in a DIFFERENT CELCO AREA or don't even have a SIM.

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+1 likes



**barisacar**

2 days ago

"The answer is to dial '55'."

I think this is very badly presented. It initially sounds like this is meant to be an \*alternative\* to dialling 999. It took me two reads through the article to realise this isn't what you're suggesting.

Can I suggest that you amend the article to say "The answer is to press '55' after you have got through to '999'". It also sounds (from what I can tell) like you'll be prompted to do so, though I imagine it's useful to know in advance in case you can't listen.

Reply · Share · 6 replies

+12 likes



**andyrooh**

2 days ago

I think you must have read it too quickly or something. It seemed perfectly clear to me that they weren't suggesting this was an alternative, and only to be used in situations where you have no other option... and I was only half paying attention when I read it.

**yellowbrickroad**

2 days ago

And if you're wrong, someone might die.

Very bold of you to put your expertise on the line for the entire nation like that.

Perhaps we should err on the safe side and run with the first poster's caution that it's not worded all that clearly...

Reply · Share · 1 reply +2 likes  **ehw**

3 hours ago

As Wm Morrison said, many British school leavers lack all the basic skills to hold down a job.

Reply · Share 0 likes  **AA**

2 days ago

It wasn't clearly worded. Dial suggests that is the number you need to "dial" to connect. But you are not dialling 55 rather responding with keys 55. So you dial 999 and then press 55.

Reply · Share +5 likes  **Summerisle**

1 day ago

If there's room for doubt, and there clearly is, then probably best to reword it.

Reply · Share +1 likes  **ehw**

3 hours ago

Obviously some people need a picture rather than a simple textual explanation.

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