



Calling for Help in the Community

Information about devices to call for help in an emergency while in the community. These devices can also be used around the home. Everyone has different needs. There are many options available. This booklet explores some of these options.

Alarms that can be used in the community use the mobile phone network. They need to have a working SIM card and network coverage to dial out. Device manufacturers build devices typically to suit a specific network. It is important to make sure that the specific 3G / 4G frequencies used by your mobile service provider are supported by the device.

How do these devices work?

They usually have a SOS type button to press in an emergency. Some will dial multiple contacts (one at a time) until someone answers. Some devices also send SMS text messages to your contacts with a link that shows the location of the device. Your contacts will need a smart phone to look up the location.

There are watch style alarms (worn on the wrist) or pendant style alarms (that hang around the neck). If worn around your neck, make sure it has a break point that will break if caught, to prevent strangulation.

Check with the supplier that the units can tell the difference between a person answering and a message service (eg. message back, or answering machine). If the call is answered by a message service, the alarm may register the call as being answered and not call the next phone number listed, and you may not get the help you need.

Battery Life

These devices require regular charging (similar to a mobile phone). Battery life is influenced by several different factors, such as cellular coverage, GPS availability, temperature and your device's activity level. Be aware that often the battery life listed is the 'standby' battery life with minimal features activated. Generally, the more you call in/out from the device and the more features you have activated on the device, the quicker the battery will be depleted.

Location

Many of the community alarms have GPS that enables the alarm to be tracked. As GPS uses satellites, it requires access to the sky. Therefore the GPS may not be as effective inside buildings, carparks and on cloudy days etc. Some Units also use the position of the mobile phone towers and other means to improve the accuracy of the location.

Please note that "Australia's mobile networks cannot automatically transmit GPS data from a handset to an emergency service call-taker at present." (See www.acma.gov.au for more details).

NOTE: the device may be able to tell you its location, but additional strategies may be required to ensure the safety of the person.

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For more information and advice contact ILC Tas

1300 885 886

or

(03) 6335 9200

Monitored vs Non-Monitored Systems

A **monitored** alarm calls a monitoring service. The monitoring service then calls the help for you (eg. friends, family, or ambulance). The advantage of these systems is that you know the call is going to be answered and the monitoring centre can see the location of the device and pass that onto the carers or emergency services. However monitored services usually have ongoing monitoring fees.

A **non-monitored** alarm calls your friends and family directly. When you activate the alarm, the unit usually sends SMS messages to your contact(s) and dials your contacts one-by-one until someone answers the phone. When someone answers, they hear a message or tone so they know you need help. Your contacts can click on a link in the SMS message to show your location on a map. They need a smart phone to see the map.

A **non-monitored** alarm may be a less reliable system as people may not answer the call and you might not get the help you need.

Water Resistance

Ask the supplier if the unit is suitable to wear when swimming, and in the bath or shower. This may also be important if you wish to also wear the alarm at home or to locate someone who lives around bodies of water like dams, rivers etc.

Extra Features:

Geo-Fencing – Sends out an alert when the unit goes out a pre-defined GPS location.

Bread-Crumbing – Marks the location of the device at time intervals (eg. every 10 mins, or every hour). This is may be useful if you need to track the device and it is likely to lose coverage (eg. go into a building). That way, you may be able to see where the unit has been prior to it losing coverage.

Fall Detection – Alerts the contact(s) if the unit detects a fall. Please note that there are various ways a unit may register that a fall has occurred. Some are more reliable than others. Some have quite sophisticated algorithms in speculating if a fall has occurred. No system is fail-safe. If the fall detection is too sensitive it may send out lots of false alarms. If it is under-sensitive it may not register a fall.

Speed Alarm - Alerts contact(s) if a unit moves over a certain speed (eg. if in a car).

Non-Movement Alarm – Alerts the contact(s) if the unit does not move for a specified amount of time.

How much do community alarms cost?

You can see information about various community alarms via our website (www.ilctas.asn.au), or contact ILC Tas on 1300 885 886 for more details.

Choosing your contacts

You must choose people to be contacted when you activate the alarm. Your contacts need to be:

- Reliable, available, and trustworthy.
- Have a smart mobile phone to take the call and look up the location of the device.
- Able to get to you quickly (eg. access to a car).
- Able to cope in a crisis (e.g. if you are hurt, bleeding or in pain).

Practise using the alarm so that your contacts know how the alarm works and what you expect of them. If you use the device at home, make sure your contacts have access to a key.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where can these devices be used?

These devices use the mobile phone network.

Some mobile phone providers have better coverage than others. Most mobile network providers will have coverage maps on their websites or from their stores.

Some devices can only operate on specific mobile networks. You need to ask the supplier of the device which mobile network they use, and whether it can be used with other mobile providers.

Can I also use these devices at home?

Yes, provided you have mobile phone coverage. Remember, the GPS tracking may not be effective if used inside.

If you use the device at home, consider storing a spare key in a 'key box' with a pin code, to enable easier access for your contacts and emergency services.



Key Box

If you only want to use it around the home, consider a home personal alarm as the button you wear is smaller and you will not need to regularly charge it.

What if there is no mobile coverage where I want to use the alarm?

If there is no mobile coverage, you will not be able to call for help. If you do not have adequate mobile phone coverage in your area, another option may be required. Call ILC Tas to discuss other options.

Who will program the alarm for me?

The alarm needs to be programmed with the contact details for your contacts and other settings. Some suppliers will program the alarm prior to sending it to you. Some suppliers sell the unit only.

If your contacts change or their details change, the details on the device will need to be updated. Some suppliers also provide ongoing support to update the programming as required.

These devices are not flawless. Things can go wrong, including:

- forgetting to wear the device,
- panicking and forgetting to press the button, or
- being unable to press the button in an emergency.
- the device getting wet or the battery going flat.

Do not rely on these devices as life saving systems. Remember to regularly check that your device is working correctly. Test runs are a good idea. These enable you and your contacts to become familiar with how the alarm system works.

Can I dial Triple Zero (000)

Calls to triple zero from non-monitored systems cannot be guaranteed a response from the emergency services if you are unable to validate your condition, location and required response. Even if the system has a recorded message, the message may not play at the correct time or relay the required information.

“Australia's mobile networks cannot automatically transmit GPS data from a handset to an emergency service call-taker at present.” (See www.acma.gov.au for more details).

Medical Note

If you have a personal medical device such as a pacemaker or hearing aid, please consult with the manufacturer of the device to determine if it is adequately shielded from external RF (radio frequency) energy.

2G (GSM) Network

Please note that the 2G (GSM) network no longer operates in Australia. Devices that are not compatible with the 3G or 4G network, will not work in Australia.

Other Options to Consider

Simple Mobile Phones

Some mobile phones have bigger buttons and a dedicated emergency button. Depending on the phone, the emergency button dials triple zero (000), a specific number, or a list of chosen numbers.



Smart Phones – Apps

Some smart phones can have additional apps added to them to make them easier to dial contacts, send text messages and/or enable carers to find out where you are in an emergency. Contact ILC Tas for more details.



Smart Watches with a SIM card

Some smart watches can have their own SIM card which enables them to make a phone call without being paired with a smart phone. Some also have location information available. Be aware that many of the smart watches have limited battery life (it can be as little as 1-2 hours) when cellular connectivity and tracking is turned on. Contact ILC Tas for more details.



Alternatives

These alternatives may be used alone or in combination with other options:

- Home Person Alarm. These do not require charging. The emergency button (pendant) has battery that usually lasts a year or more (check with the supplier). They are designed to be used around the home. They will only work within range of the base unit (which plugs into a power point). The range usually covers a standard suburban block. Some have an extended range. See our separate **information sheet 'Calling for Help – At home' for more details.**
- The Red Cross Telecross Service makes a daily phone call at an agreed time to check that all is well (free service). Phone the Red Cross on 1300 885 698 for more details.
- Call a family member or friend at a specific time each day or have them call you.
- A loud whistle or duress alarm to alert someone close by.

Contact ILC Tas for more information

ILC Tas is an information and advisory service about equipment to help with daily living:

-  Ring 1300 885 886 to speak to a health professional.
-  Visit our website www.ilctas.asn.au or email ilc@ilctas.asn.au.
-  Make an appointment to visit the centre at 275 Wellington Street, South Launceston.
-  Ring us to find out when we will be visiting your area.

ILC Tas is a not for profit organisation and does not sell equipment.