

Response to consultation on a three-digit number for the national power cut and electricity network safety service

Submitted by: Mr M. Radford

1. The consultation is with regards to a request from Energy Network Association (ENA)
2. As stated, "ENA represents the 'wires and pipes' transmission and distribution network operators for gas and electricity in the UK and Ireland. This consultation and ENA's request relates to electricity networks only."
3. The consultation does not make it clear why the proposal is restricted to electricity networks only.
4. The consultation makes it clear that there is a limited supply of three-digit numbers.
5. If the proposal for allocation of a three-digit number for electricity network purposes is successful, what would prevent the same organisation coming forward asking for another three-digit number for a similar gas emergency number.
6. There are other utilities which would have a similar need for three-digit emergency-type numbers – for example the water companies. They might, for example, want a reporting line for water leaks in the street
7. In my view, it would be better if Ofcom were to refuse this request at this time; and instead to request the gas, electricity and water industry to cooperate in looking at a single "utilities" emergency number that might cover all of these areas. In the same way as the "999/112" service, this might a single service that would divert calls to an appropriate call centre for the three specific utilities (i.e. a gas call centre, an electricity call centre, a water call centre).
8. Having a single "utilities emergency" number would make it more likely that it would be remembered by people than a set of potentially three or more different numbers.
9. The consultation documents indicate that in the case of electricity emergencies, people do not know who to contact; whether it is their supplier or the network operator; and in any case they are unlikely to have the relevant phone number to hand. If a person smells gas in the street, this is an emergency where they need a memorable number so they can phone to report it immediately; in just the same way as if they saw a water leak.
10. In many cases, if people don't report a problem immediately, I think they are very unlikely to report it later. And if hypothetical future gas and water emergency numbers are set up, are people really likely to be able to remember which of the numbers deal with gas, electricity and water respectively.
11. It is bad enough in some areas that the water and sewerage services are provided by two different companies, so not only do you have to look up a company's emergency number, you also have to check you're looking at the right company. (In my area, Bristol Water supply the water; Wessex Water provide sewerage services; and they have a joint venture to do the billing.
12. As stated, I feel this is an opportunity for Ofcom to ask the electricity industry to go back to the drawing board, and consult other "utilities" suppliers to see if a single number can be set up to serve all of them. If they subsequently find that this won't work, then they should submit a new request for their own three-digit number, outlining why they feel that a joint service wouldn't work.

13. As a side note, I would observe that my local electricity distribution network operator recently changed its emergency number from the somewhat memorable 0800 365 900 to the rather less memorable 0800 6783 105.