

Emergency phone system for cars planned for 2009

If the EU commission and the automobile industry have their way, new cars will be equipped with automatic emergency call systems in Europe starting in 2009. If there is an accident, the "eCall" system will either automatically or manually call the emergency number 112 and transmit the exact location of the accident. At a conference for the EU initiative "[eSafety](#)", which aims to halve the number of deaths due to car accidents in Europe by 2010, representatives of the EU member states and the industry agreed to a plan of action.

By the end of 2005, the standards and specifications for the eCall system will be defined, with field tests being conducted in 2006, and all new cars equipped with the eCall technology starting in 2009. The European emergency number 112 is to be used, with the addition of information about the caller's location. Proponents of eCall point out, however, that the system will only work if the emergency centers of the member states are equipped to process the eCall location information no later than 2007. Everyone is going to have to work together.

The eSafety group proudly announced that "more than 20 parties from industry, the European commission, and the member states" have signed a declaration of intent specifying which measures the commission, the member states, the automotive industry, telecommunications companies, and insurance providers will have to take. However, none of the [signatures](#) on the *Memorandum of Understanding for Realisation of Interoperable In-Vehicle eCall* (PDF) are from a major telecommunications company or an insurance firm.

In addition, not all of the current 25 member states in the EU seem to have heard about the eCall initiative: almost a third of the signatures on the memorandum of understanding are from Finland -- including one from the mayor of [Oulu](#) -- with the rest being from public authorities, automobile clubs, and generally small companies in six other EU countries. One of them is from Switzerland, and another from [ACEA](#), the special interest group of the European automotive industry. It is thus not clear when the statement made by the EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media, Viviane Reding, that eCall is an area where "an EU-wide consensus is helping overcome technical and business obstacles towards the introduction of a life-saving road safety system in Europe" will come true.

As there are a few specifics available at the moment aside from this memorandum of understanding, including no technical details at all, this ambitious eCall project -- which is to save some 2000 lives per year in automotive accidents -- just may suffer the same fate as the [24 GHz short-range radar system for cars](#). The blanket use of this anti-crash radar was to help reduce the number of deaths from traffic accidents significantly. However, the EU Commission restricted the number of vehicles equipped with this short-range radar system so drastically that the only cars to be equipped with such a collision warning system in the next few years will be a few select high-end models. (*Craig Morris*) / (jk/c't)

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