eCall eNewsletter No.6 - March 2009

The eCall eNewsletter gives you a general update on eCall activities and events, and provides you with news coming from the stakeholders.

If there is anything that you would like to comment on this service, please send your feedback to eCall@esafetysupport.org.

More information can be found on the eCall Toolbox.

Background

The pan-European in-vehicle emergency call system, "eCall", is a system that automatically calls 112, connecting to the most appropriate emergency response centre in the event of a serious traffic accident. During the call the accurate location of the accident scene is transmitted to the centre, even if there is no voice conversation, when for example all occupants have lost consciousness. The eCall can also be triggered manually. Knowledge of the exact location can reduce the response time of the rescue teams by 40 % in built-up areas and 50 % in rural environments. 2.500 lives could be saved in the European Union annually, and 15 % of serious injuries mitigated, if all European cars were equipped with eCall..

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The European eCall Platform will boost eCall deployment across Europe

The first meeting in the framework of the European eCall Implementation Platform was successfully held on 12 February this year.

The eCall initiative has progressed significantly in the year 2008, in particular regarding completion of the standards, negotiation with automotive industry and commitment from new stakeholders. These results show that it is the moment when all stakeholders should start with concrete implementation plans to deploy eCall

Therefore the European eCall Implementation Platform aims to be the coordination body bringing together all major stakeholders to synchronise their activities that would accelerate the deployment of eCall at national and European level. The Platform will further develop the previous work accomplished by the eCall Driving Group, PSAPs Expert Group and the European Standardisation Organisations.

Participants included representatives of the European Commission, Member States (MS), industry and other major stakeholders. The main objectives and structure of the Platform along with the nomination of the chair and his mandate duration were discussed in this kick-off meeting. After a constructive debate it was agreed that for a period of two years ERTICO will take the role of chair and will be supported by a vice-chair, which should be a MS with a one year mandate. Finland was the first MS designated to ensure the role of the vice-chair, as first MS who signed the MoU.

The meeting highlighted the need to set up a work-programme including milestones and a series of tasks to be coordinated to ensure progress on the implementation of eCall across Europe as well as an effective and harmonised deployment of the service.

The Platform should allocate responsibilities, adopt decisions by consensus at its plenary meetings and organise campaigns to increase awareness of the European citizens on eCall. This will be the main objective of the second meeting, which will take place on 24th March 2004.

Representatives of the European Commission, Members States and industry discussing the main objectives of the Platform.

European Commission ITS Action Plan supports eCall deployment

On 16 December 2008, the European Commission published the European Commission Action Plan for the Deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems in Europe.

The ITS Action Plan underlines the role that Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) can play to deliver clean, efficient, safe and secure road transport and it aims to accelerate and coordinate the deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) in road transport, including interfaces with other transport modes and to create a consistent and comprehensive policy framework, to unlock the full potential of ITS in serving European and national policies.

In order to reach these objectives the EC identified six priority areas for actions and road safety and security is one of them. Although safety and security-related systems have already proven their effectiveness when deployed, further development and coordinated efforts still need to be considered to foster their wide scale deployment and installation in new vehicles. eCall deployment is one of the actions included in the road safety and security area.

As clearly demonstrated by a number of recent studies, eCall is one of the most effective safety systems that can be deployed. eCall will improve the whole emergency rescue chain: it will provide accurate location of the accident, reduce the communication delay by immediately sending the necessary information to the most appropriate Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), and by allowing the PSAP operator to immediately dispatch the emergency services to the correct location.

The Action Plan underlines the utmost importance of the implementation platform for the harmonised introduction of pan-European eCall, including awareness campaigns, upgrading Public Safety Access Points' infrastructures and and an assessment of the need for regulation.
For more information on the ITS Action Plan please click here.

EU Commissioner Reding asks Member States to set up national platforms for eCall implementation

The EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media addressed an official letter to all Members States where she drew their attention to the European Parliament resolution on the European Commission's Intelligent Car Communication: “Towards Europe-wide Safer, Cleaner and Efficient Mobility” which was discussed and voted on by a large majority in the Plenary of the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 19 June.

One of the key eSafety issues highlighted by the Commission’s Intelligent Car Communication of 17 September 2007 and fully supported by the European Parliament in its resolution is the deployment of the pan-European emergency call system eCall.

Moreover in this resolution the European Parliament calls on Members States to all sign the eCall Memorandum of Understanding and to commit to a number of actions aiming at the development of a European eCall Implementation Platform. The European platform, run by national stakeholders previously nominated by each member state, will coordinate the deployment of eCall in Europe. Furthermore, all relevant public and private stakeholders from each Member State should join their efforts to develop implementation plans for eCall at country level and set up National Platforms to ensure good coordination between the actions taken at European and national level.

In order to achieve the requested actions each Member State should provide the European Commission with an update on their planned actions and with the name of the contact person for the European eCall Implementation Platform.

CEN eCall standardisation work makes good early progress

Important progress has been observed in 2008 in the CEN standardisation work for eCall service.

At the beginning of the year the standardisation of the MSD content has been finalised: after the CEN ballot the eCall MSD has been approved as a CEN Technical Specification (CEN 15722), soon to be balloted as a full European standard.

Working Group CEN TC 278 WG 15 has also made progress in the standardisation of the "Pan-European eCall Operational Requirements". The standard has been agreed and sent for comments in autumn 2008. It is expected to have the eCall Operational Requirements approved as Technical Specifications by mid of 2009 and the European standards by the end of 2009.

Always under CEN TC 278 WG 15, new Working Items have been opened and started drafting new standards. The “Third Party Services supporting eCall, *TPS-eCall*", which is looking at the standardisation needs for those private service providers offering eCall solutions. In those cases, the vehicle will dial a private number to contact a call centre, which will filter the call and transmit the MSD and the call to the Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in case of emergency. The editing group is looking into the necessary operational requirements, and in particular into the interfaces between the eCall Service Providers and the PSAPs.

A second Working Item is the "High Level Application Protocols", for which the EU Commission intends to fund a project team to accelerate the work.

Last but not least, the Working "Quality of Service Requirements for eCall" has been proposed and accepted. This item has been submitted to TC278 Secretariat and approved at Plenary in September 2008.

Each single committee covers crucial aspects of eCall and all together, the Working Groups give a concrete push forward to the implementation of the in-vehicle emergency call by compiling knowledge and exchanging experience. Should you, readers, be interested in joining one of them please do not hesitate to contact eSafety Support : info@esafetysupport.org.

European Standardisation Organisations choose the eCall transmission channel

ETSI, the European Telecommunication Standardisation Institute (ETSI-MSG) and 3GPP evaluated a number of possible technical solutions to produce a recommendation for an eCall common communication protocol. Several candidates applied to 3GPP in order to test their technology during last summer. At the end of the testing process, 3GPP announced that the transmission technology that best satisfied the eCall requirements was the in-band modem developed by Qualcomm.

The test results revealed that the modem presented by Qualcomm is a feasible and sustainable solution since it does not request any modification of the network and 112 calls would never be blocked if a failure occurs. In case the eCall will be forwarded to non upgraded PSAP, although very unlikely, the operator will just wait for two seconds before the voice call will be established.
Moreover, the modem could be accommodated to provide bidirectional communication and the transmission of the MSD is by far within the requirements either in normal conditions (1.37 sec.) or bad conditions (2.1 sec. in average).

Qualcomm has stated that the technology will be free of charge for PSAPs and vehicles, if used for emergency calls. The selection of Qualcomm in-band modem technology is a major step forward towards eCall implementation.

The technical specifications with the general description of the solution and the reference codes are expected to be approved by 3GPP on 12 March 2009.

For more information on the status of the eCall standardisation at ETSI/3GPP and CEN see the table available in the eCall Toolbox.

Software uses existing vehicle information for better emergency responses

The deployment of the in-vehicle emergency call (eCall) is a priority both for the industry and the public sector. In cases where a vehicle is involved in an accident, an eCall can be initiated automatically or manually, and a Minimum Set of Data (MSD) containing vehicle specific and high accuracy location information will be passed to the Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs).Using this MSD information, the emergency services agency receiving the call can accurately locate the accident and provide more rapid assistance to accident victims, and consequently save more lives.

Included in the MSD data set is the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN). VINs are used to uniquely identity motor vehicles. The PSAPs need a VIN decoder to extract the relevant information included in the VIN such as: vehicle brand, model, model year, and type of energy (when included). Due to privacy regulations, the decoder shall provide only the information strictly necessary to handle the emergency in an appropriate way.

It is important that the VIN decoder is able to extract this information rapidly and correctly enabling the PSAP operator to respond immediately to the emergency call with all the necessary data. To achieve this, the decoder must recognise the structure and coding of each vehicle manufacturer VIN.

A VIN decoder software was developed by Connexis and tested successfully against VIN information from 20 OEMs. Connexis also provided a set of recommendations to ensure that the VIN database is kept up to date.

The best maintenance scheme has still to be decided and agreed between OEMs and PSAPs. The support of the OEMs in the maintenance process is vital to the successful deployment of the decoder, thus strengthening cooperation is of utmost important.

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eCall Impact Assessment Study will investigate different options for market introduction of eCall across Europe

To support the political decision on whether or not to introduce a regulatory approach, the European Commission has launched an eCall Impact Assessment Study that will investigate the market introduction of eCall across Europe, analyse the legal and liability issues, carry out a full assessment of potential impact of eCall introduction, identify the costs and benefits, and assess three specific policy options: do nothing, voluntary agreement supported with public sector campaigns and other actions, or mandatory introduction by regulation.

In addition to supporting this decision by the European Commission, the study will provide help to inform decision making by other stakeholders in the eCall service chain.

The eCall Impact Assessment Study, lead by TRL, involve as major partners TNO, VTT, eSafetyAware, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and ERTICO. The study will be run over 6 months and first results are expected by May 2009.

For more information about the study, please refer to:
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/esafety/studies/details/index_en.htm.

2008: eCall PSAPs Expert Group meetings

The eCall PSAPs Expert Group had two fruitful meetings in 2008, which discussed the state of the art of the eCall activities in the Member States (MS), the progress made regarding standardisation issues and the next steps to be taken to accelerate the eCall deployment and implementation.

Discussions focused on the progresses made in the standardisation process and technical specifications that will be approved beginning of 2009 in order to enable MS to upgrade the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) before starting their testing plans.

Concerning the different state of the art eCall implementation plans in the European countries , in some countries the access to PSAPs will be direct, the PSAPs are well equipped and are only waiting for final standards approval to start the implementation plans, in some others, PSAPs need to be completely restructured to include eCall. The group also discussed common positions regarding standardisation.

Another topic discussed during these meetings was the proposal for a European eCall Implementation platform. The concept proposed was a 10-step voluntary approach aiming at establishing national eCall platforms and a European eCall Roll-out Platform to overcome current roadblocks such as delay in standardisation and encourage the signature of remaining MS, namely the UK and France. Most of the PSAPs expressed their support for the platform proposal, highlighting the fact that the establishment of national platforms and clusters is a good initiative especially if the clusters could gather together those MS which have similar PSAP infrastructures.

The eCall PSAPs Expert Group proved its effectiveness to address problems related to PSAPs and achieve consensus. The PSAPs Expert Group agreed to remain on stand-by situation, as most of the activities will be taken over by the European eCall Implementation Platform. Further participation is required and Member States are encouraged to nominate representatives to the Platform to keep the momentum going into 2009 and beyond.

Automotive industry reiterates its commitment to eCall

The automotive industry was amongst the first stakeholders signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and decided from the very beginning to contribute to the development and agreement of feasible implementation and business plans for pan-European eCall.

Despite many joint efforts made by all relevant parties committed to achieve the overall objectives of the implementation of in-vehicle eCall, the whole process has been delayed and a series of necessary actions still need to be fulfilled both from the Telecommunication and service provider side as well as from the Member States.

However, the automotive industry renews its commitment to introduce eCall as a standard option for all new approved vehicles with sufficient lead-time after all standards and specifications have been finally approved and the overall process has been successfully tested. Additionally, it is very important that current and future Member States who have signed the MoU show full commitment to the eCall roll-out platform both at European and national level.

The European infrastructure for emergency services varies from one country to another. Nevertheless the current financial crisis and the national and European recovery plans with significant investments in infrastructure provide an opportunity to also promote eCall implementation with financial incentives and investments in PSAP infrastructure.

An in-vehicle eCall can show all its benefits only when the appropriate infrastructure is in place and emergency calls are delivered in the quickest and most efficient way.

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eCall Memorandum of Understanding: the signatures which took place in 2008

- 03.03.2008: Mr. Carlos De Alpoim Vieira Barbosa, on behalf of Automovel Club de Portugal

- 05.03.2008: Dr.-Ing. Wolfgang Ziebart on behalf of Infineon Technologies AG

- 16.04.2008: Mr. Pierre-Enric Steiger, on behalf of Björn Steiger Stiftung.

- 16.04.2008: Mr. Demir Rakanovic, on behalf of Neonseven SpA

- 21.04.2008: Mr. Frank Horst Schankon behalf of Paragon Fidelity GmbH

- 30.05.2008: Mr. Vittorio Colao on behalf of Vodafone Europe

- 09.06.2008: Mr. Iacopo Bini Smaghi, on behalf of Altea

- 13.06.2008: Minister l'Ubomir Vazny on behalf of the Ministry of Transport, Posts & Telecommunications of the Slovak Republic

- 22.07.2008: Mr. Martin Vial on behalf of Europ Assitance Holding SA

- 17.09.2008: Mr. Marc De Jong on behalf of NXP Semiconductors

- 21.10.2008: Mr: Vicenç Aguilera Caelles on behalf of Ficosa

To see the updated list please follow this link:
http://www.esafetysupport.org/en/ecall_toolbox/memorandum_of_understanding_mou/