

TELECOMMUNICATIONS NUMBERING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mis-dialed calls to Police's "999" Emergency Services Centres

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to seek Member's comments and views on the following requests from the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) for avoiding mis-dialed calls to the "999" Emergency Services Centres -

- to change the numbering plan such that any numbers ending with digits "999" and number blocks with close resemblance to "999" should not be assigned to customers and/or operators; and
- to request the industry to adopt other digits instead of "9" for seizure of outgoing trunks from the Private Automatic Branch Exchange (PABX) systems.

Mis-dialed Calls to "999" and "992"

2. Recently, the Office of the Telecommunications Authority (OFTA) received a report from HKPF that the "999" Emergency Services Centre had received a number of nuisance calls from callers who were in fact calling to a customer service centre of a private organization. It was found that this private organisation had used a PABX extension number "8999" for its customer service centre. However, due to a human mistake, the extension number of this centre was accidentally programmed as "9999". As a result, all incoming calls to this customer service centre were routed via the PABX system to the Police's "999" Emergency Services Centre. This had caused some disruptions to the operation of the Police's "999" Emergency Services Centre. HKPF opined that in order to avoid similar occurrence in future, numbers ending with digits "999" in the numbering plan should not be assigned to end customers or users. It further requested OFTA not to allocate number blocks with prefixes close to "999", such as "899", "989", "998" etc, to operators.

3. HKPF further reported that the "992" (Fax for Emergency Services) was also affected by mis-dialed calls which were suspected to be calling to mobile phone numbers with the prefix digits "92". It was believed that some people who were accustomed to using PABX extensions had mistakenly dialed the digit "9" upon using the direct exchange lines for calling to mobile phone numbers "92XX XXXX". As a result, they had pressed "9" and then the mobile phone number "92XX XXXX". Having detected the first three digits "992", the

public switched telephone network routed the calls instantly to the Police's "992" Fax for Emergency Service. HKPF requested OFTA to resolve the problem by using other digits instead of "9" in PABX systems for the seizure of outgoing trunks.

The TA's Considerations

4. As regards the problem raised by HKPF in paragraph 2, the Telecommunications Authority (TA) considers that by careful programming of PABX systems, the incidence could be avoided. However, the TA considers that it would be a waste of valuable numbering resources in the Hong Kong Numbering Plan if numbers ending with digits "999" and number blocks with prefixes close to "999" are all put aside and not assigned and used. In addition, it is expected that Fixed Telecommunication Network Services (FTNS) operators would have a problem to withdraw and/or withhold the required sub-levels from Direct-Dialling-In (DDI) number ranges which have been assigned to PABX customers. The TA suggests to issue a circular letter to the industry especially the PABX suppliers and maintenance contractors in order to draw their attention to the issue and particularly the need for carrying out proper programming work whenever required on their PABX systems in order to avoid similar problems to happen again in future.

6. With regard to the problem raised by HKPF in paragraph 3, the TA considers that it would not be practical and in the interest of customers to migrate all the mobile phone numbers under the existing "92" level to other level. Since the digit "9" has already been widely used and programmed in the existing PABX systems in Hong Kong for seizing outgoing trunks, it would be difficult for the industry to have a drastic change of this current practice. However, it is considered that the best approach is for the TA to encourage PABX users/suppliers and maintenance contractors to voluntarily program and use other digits instead of digit "9" for such purpose. It is hoped that the number of mis-dialed calls to "992" could be minimised over time.

Advice Sought

7. Members are invited to give their comments and views on the requests of HKPF and the TA's considerations given in paragraphs 4 -6 above.

Office of the Telecommunications Authority
12 November 1999