

Media release

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Emergency response ICT systems straining from increasing demand

The Auditor-General, John Doyle, tabled a report in Parliament today, *Emergency Response ICT Systems*, which concluded that the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) is meeting its call taking and non-emergency dispatch standards when all its information and communications technology (ICT) systems are working satisfactorily. But it is consistently failing to meet its emergency ambulance dispatch standards and has not achieved these for three years.

John Doyle said, 'I observed that ESTA is an organisation under some stress. It is currently receiving an emergency call on average every 13 seconds with demand growing at approximately 3 per cent each year. Its Computer Aided Dispatch system has had a recent history of failure and has not been upgraded because of previous industrial action. I note, however, that the system is about to be upgraded'.

ESTA's performance is subject to standards published by the Inspector General for Emergency Management, who makes a determination after consultation with ESTA and each of the emergency services organisations. These standards apply to the response time to answer an incoming call and the total time taken to initiate the dispatch of an emergency responder.

John Doyle said, 'ESTA is meeting its emergency dispatch performance standards for police and fire services but it has not met its ambulance emergency dispatch standards over the past three years because of issues with some ESTA procedures and staffing.'

'I also noted that ESTA is failing to predict the likely increase in demand for call taking during major incidents. This leads to calls being queued and a consequential delay in the dispatch of responder units. ESTA will be challenged to meet its performance standards given the growth in demand for its services is currently 3 per cent each year. This is concerning'.

While most radio systems and their supporting networks use modern technology provided under contract by third parties, the Auditor-General observed that certain metropolitan police channels can become congested during period of high demand and when protective services officers are on duty at railway stations.

The report also highlighted that the unsecure nature of the legacy rural radio network is a safety risk for police as it can be easily monitored by radio scanners. A new digital network in use by the Country Fire Authority could address most of this network's shortcomings, if it was extended to other emergency response organisations.

John Doyle said, 'On a daily basis Victorians rely on police, fire, ambulance and other emergency service organisations to respond to emergency incidents that may range from critical medical emergencies to fires, road, rail and air accidents, or storm damage to homes and infrastructure.'

'Our emergency service organisations are required to be appropriately responsive to a broad range of events. Their information and communications technology systems need to be sufficiently reliable and available to ensure they can operate effectively.'

In the report, the Auditor-General makes 10 recommendations. All relevant agencies have accepted their applicable recommendations and indicated specific courses of action they would take.

Background

This audit considered the processes and systems used from when an emergency call is received by ESTA, until the successful dispatch of an emergency responder unit. The audit examined 11 public sector agencies including ESTA, all the emergency service organisations, as well as their portfolio departments.

The Victorian Auditor-General's Office will undertake a further audit this year which will examine emergency response time performance which is from when a responder receives an ESTA dispatch instruction until their arrival at the incident scene.

[Link to report](#)

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Note to editors:

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