

## 999 number being abused

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Dubai: Inquiring about whether a certain brand of bottled drinking water is healthy or not is one of the many trivial calls that Dubai Police's Command and Control Room receives at 999 - a dedicated number allocated to emergency calls only.

Colonel Omar Abdullah Al Shamsi, director of the Command and Control Room, said: "We have been [repeatedly] saying that 999 is for emergency calls only, for years now, but the situation remains the same as more than half of the calls received on 999 continue to be trivial, general inquiries."

He said the diverse cultural backgrounds of the people living in the city is one of the factors behind this issue.

Colonel Al Shamsi said there was a whopping 1.7 million calls received on 999 in 2008.

"Around 549,892 calls made in 2008 were inquiries on trivial issues and that was more than half the total number," he said.

Colonel Al Shamsi said the number 999 receives on an average 8,000-10,000 calls daily and police personnel are required to take each and every call because they do not know which is a genuine emergency until they have answered it.

A walk in the Command and Control Room shows how busy each and every person is, working in that room, attending to all kinds of calls and providing as much help as possible to every caller.

"The personnel attending to calls on 999 try to answer the non-emergency inquiries of all callers in every way possible, but if information is unavailable, the personnel guide callers to where they can find the information," Colonel Al Shamsi said.

Colonel Al Shamsi said the Command and Control Room has 30 dedicated personnel round the clock to take calls on 999.

"We have a goal, as mentioned in Dubai Police's strategy, stating that we have to answer calls on 999 within three rings, which equals 10 seconds," he said.

He said from January to September in 2008, the average percentage of response to calls on 999 reached 93.9 per cent.

"All the personnel assigned to answer calls on 999 go through intensive training in various languages and on the methods of answering the calls, in addition to skills of customer service. They also have skills to calm down callers, especially the frustrated or nervous ones," Colonel Al Shamsi said.

Colonel Al Shamsi said soon there will be a dedicated number for inquiries, but he refused to elaborate on the issue. Anyone who is not in danger or in dire need of help should call the police general enquiries line on 04-2694848.

The number 999 receives all kinds of calls and inquiries, including queries on the available credit on one's mobile phone, complaints on disputes over parking spaces at shopping malls and so on.

There are other callers who report their missing dogs and horses, especially in the Jumeirah area!

Other calls include those from hassled girlfriends who complain about their boyfriends who have left them after a dispute.

Colonel Al Shamsi said many people, who do not have enough awareness about the emergency number, use public phones which have signboards with emergency numbers.

Colonel Al Shamsi said some irresponsible people even divert the annoying calls they receive on their mobile phones to 999. "We make such people sign an undertaking not to repeat such a thing," he said.

04-2694848 is the number to dial for general inquiries with the police

The number 999 receives all kinds of calls and inquiries, despite being allocated only for emergencies. More than half of the calls received on 999 are trivial calls and general inquiries.

Some examples of trivial calls include:

How can I check the credit on my mobile phone?

Is a certain brand of water bottle healthy or not?

I have been looking for a parking lot for the past three hours and when I found one, another motorist took it, what do I do?

My dog/horse has gone missing, what should I do?

What is the speed limit on a certain road?

Other calls include worried girlfriends calling 999 saying their boyfriends have left them after personal disputes.

Colonel Omar Al Shamsi, Director of Dubai Police's Command and Control Room, said many people, who do not have enough awareness about the emergency number, use public phones which have signboards with emergency numbers.

"They use the 999 number to call from a public phone and inquire about trivial things especially that calling the emergency number is free of charge," he said.

He said some irresponsible people even divert some annoying calls they receive from their mobiles to 999.

"We bring those who do such things and make them sign undertaking not to repeat such thing and if repeated, we take strict action against them," he said.

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