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- Money
- Sports
- Life
- Tech
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In case of emergency, put your cell on ICE

By Elyse Andrews, USA TODAY

A movement is underway to turn the ubiquitous cell phone into a source of information for paramedics and other emergency personnel responding to accidents, crimes and disasters.



Phone users are being encouraged to list their emergency contact under the acronym ICE, shown here.

By Leslie Smith Jr., USA TODAY

A British paramedic came up with the idea of asking cell phone users to input an entry into their cellular phonebook called ICE for "in case of emergency." Accompanying that acronym would be the name and phone numbers of the person who should be called if something has happened to the owner of the phone.

The ICE campaign was launched in Britain in April, but people really started paying attention after the July terrorist bombings in London that killed 56 and injured hundreds.

Bob Brotchie, a Cambridge-based paramedic for 13 years, says he has responded to many accidents in which the injured person carried no information about next of kin or emergency contacts. This makes it difficult for paramedics because they don't know the patient's medical history or allergies, he says.

The British campaign, initially promoted in conjunction with Vodafone's annual Life Savers Awards, is "going phenomenally well," says Brotchie. Vodafone is a British mobile phone company.

Now paramedics in the USA want to encourage ICE usage by Americans. "I certainly think it can help," says Matthew Levy of the International Association of EMTs and Paramedics. "(We are) hoping that we can get people excited."

Joe Farren of the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association-Wireless Network says the industry is definitely interested in joining the campaign.

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And word is spreading in the USA via news reports and word of mouth.

Linda Huntress of Meredith, N.H., received an e-mail about ICE that she forwarded to her friends and family. She programmed ICE into her phone, noting that it's better than other forms of identification because women sometimes go out without a purse but bring their cell phones.

"Basically, we have cell phones so that we have a way to reach help," she says. "I would want my family to know what happened to me."

Farren says there are so many different U.S. service providers that one of the challenges is getting all the companies to promote use of the same acronym. If they don't, it will be confusing to those who need the number, he says.

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