

Hoax Calls

A hoax or malicious call is when a person deliberately telephones the fire, police or ambulance service and tells them there is an emergency when there is not.

Hoax calls divert the emergency services away from people who may be in life-threatening situations and who need urgent help. This can mean the difference between life and death for someone in trouble.

Any person who makes a hoax call is committing a criminal offence. The actual law states that a hoax caller is 'a person who for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another, sends, or causes to be sent, by means of a public electronic communications network, a message that the person knows to be false'.

A person making a hoax call to emergency services can be taken to court and may face a fine of up to £5,000 and/or be sent to prison for six months.

All calls to the emergency services are voice recorded and the number of the telephone being used to make the call is displayed to the emergency operator. It only takes a few seconds for the operator to find out the address of where the call is being made from. Other facilities such as CCTV can, and are, used to detect offenders.

Mobile phone network providers will disconnect mobile numbers, after problems with persistent hoax or inappropriate 999 calls.

Prosecutions

With successful prosecutions the emergency services can apply for compensation. A cost can be claimed per hour for each fire engine called out to an incident that turns out to be a hoax call. An additional cost is requested if an officer also had to attend.

Education

We would urge parents and guardians to tell their children about the consequences of making hoax calls to emergency services.

The greatest consequence is that if we are dealing with a hoax call, we may be delayed getting to a real emergency where someone's life is in danger - and that person in danger could be the hoax caller's family member or friend.

