Software Review: Emergency+ smartphone application
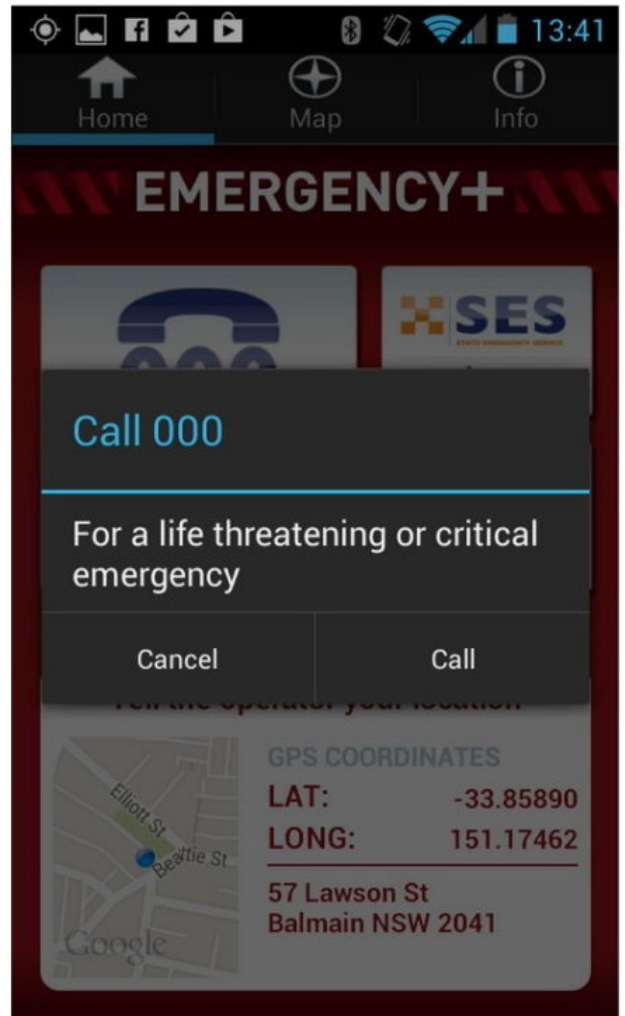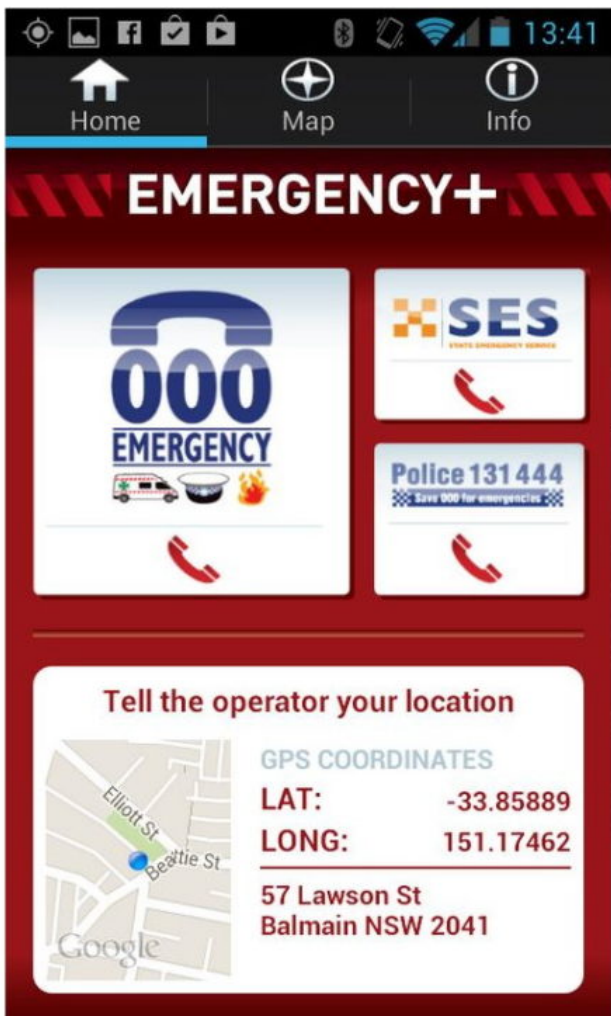
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Ed: This article was originally part of the East SIG Report but is being run as a standalone article due to the fact that this app could be important and useful to members over summer. Thanks to Malcolm Miles for the suggestion.

Brian Heywood introduced members to a smartphone app that's comparatively unknown in Victoria, but one everyone should have. The app is called **Emergency+** and is available free for iPhone, Android and Windows phones. Due to its simple and clear interface the app enables people to call with their location the right emergency number quickly without having to remember numbers. It was developed and launched in 2013 by the "Triple Zero Awareness Work Group" and can be used anywhere in Australia.

The **Emergency+** app uses a mobile phone's GPS so callers to Triple Zero can provide emergency operators their location information displayed on the apps home screen. In addition to Triple Zero, the apps home screen also includes SES and Police Assistance Line numbers so non-emergency calls are made to the most appropriate number.

After selecting the **Emergency+** icon on your phone, the Home screen is displayed. From here you can select the emergency service you want, Triple Zero, SES or the Police Assistance Line number for non-emergency calls. When installing the app, you need to give permission for the app to access your location. This is needed so the app can use the GPS functionality on the phone to determine its location. The app displays the location using the phones GPS or A-GPS which you relay to the emergency operator when requested.

Pressing one of the 3 emergency buttons on the Home screen does not automatically connect you to that service. As a failsafe measure you have to confirm to make the call.

Many people would be used to calling the emergency number Triple "O" which is a throwback to the days of rotary telephone dials. With the advent of alphanumeric keypads and to avoid confusion the correct name we should now be using is Triple Zero.

After explaining the basics of the **Emergency+** app, Brian gave a short history of the emergency number we use in Australia. In 1961 the PMG (Post Master General) Department established the emergency phone number Triple Zero. The number zero (0) was chosen firstly because it was the last number on a rotary telephone dial and could easily be found in the dark. Secondly, in outback Queensland you would dial 0 to access an outside phone line, then dial 0 again to access an operator and if that failed dial 0 again to access the operator further along the line.
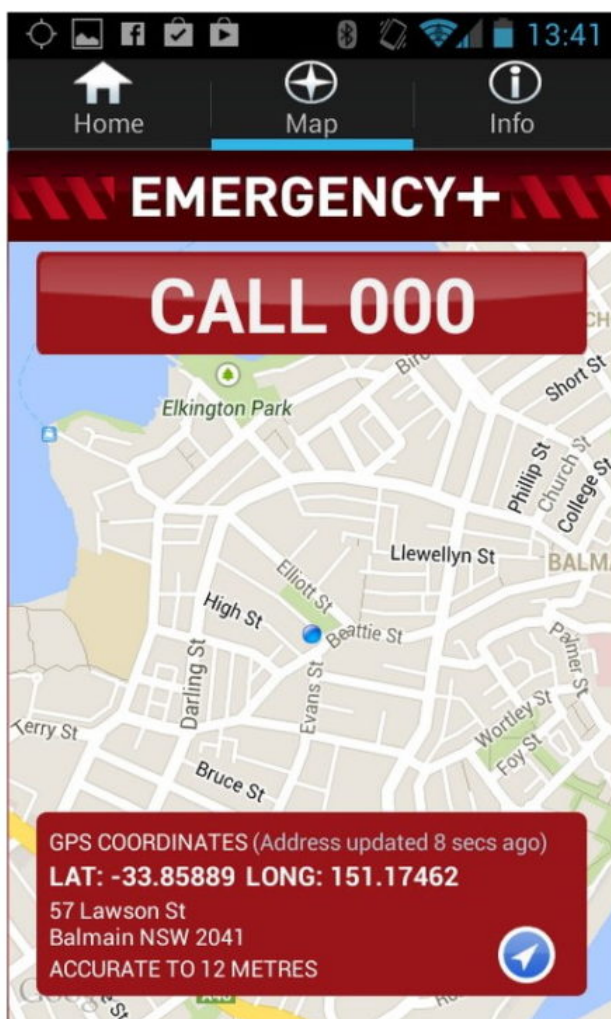
In the 1980's Triple Zero (000) became a national number for critical emergencies. In 2013 the "Triple Zero Awareness Work Group" based in NSW released the **Emergency+** app.

To demonstrate the app in use, Brian showed a short video used to train emergency operators and users of the **Emergency+** app. The video is available online at http://www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au/Community-Info/Emergency-App.html or on YouTube at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hThHoRNhEnQ&feature=youtu.be

From the apps Home screen you can access 2 additional displays by selecting the icons at the top of the screen. Selecting the middle icon displays a map screen while the right icon displays information on other emergency numbers. The Map screen displays your current location depicted by a blue circle, GPS coordinates shown as Latitude & Longitude and street address if appropriate. The Information screen displays information and links to the 3 main emergencies services along with other National numbers. Scroll down the information screen to display additional emergency phone number icons that link the user to the following National numbers:

- Crime Stoppers
- Health Direct
- National relay Service
- National Security Hotline
- Poison Information

It's not well known but Triple Zero is not the only phone number for critical emergencies in Australia. Number 112 works for all GSM or GSM derived mobiles (the system used in Australia) and 106 is used for text based emergencies. All calls to any of these emergency numbers are free. Calls use the strongest signal available so are independent of your phone carrier.

To conclude his presentation Brian summarised how the Latitude and Longitude figures derived from the phone's GPS relate to Australia. For further information or to suggest improvements to the Emergency+ app contact the "Triple Zero Awareness Work Group" at TripleZero@fire.nsw.gov.au.