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**Security and fire industry take up the challenge of the new Electronic Call Handling Operation (ECHO) project**

The industry trade bodies, British Security Industry Association, Fire Industry Association and Fire & Security Association are pleased to be playing a key role in the development of a new Electronic Call Handling Operation (ECHO) project, which aims to bring the security and fire industries closer together with the emergency services by enabling the centralised transfer of electronic alarm messages from protected premises to the emergency services’ control rooms.

The prime function of ECHO is to deliver an end-to-end electronic alarm handing ability, reducing call handling times and reducing errors from manual response handling within the ARC and emergency services. Migration to an electronic medium should also add value by providing the realistic opportunity to apply and manage URNs online. Though initially focused on alarm message handling, the opportunity to consider other means of confirmation through video and audio also exist for the future.

Though a similar service to this has been successfully piloted for some time with a limited number of alarm companies and police forces, the ECHO project is a milestone change in enabling the technology to be rolled out to other police and fire control rooms.

Following discussions between the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and the private security industry back in 2015, the decision to implement electronic transfer was agreed, resulting in the NPCC security systems policy citing a date of 2020 for all Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) to be operating on an electronic platform.

Though the industry has spent the past 18 months considering a suitable platform, initial funding to launch the project, has only recently been secured.

The trade bodies have picked up on the challenge to make this evolution a reality to meet the deadline set by NPCC, and as a result has instigated an initial meeting of key stakeholders to brief them on the expectations and potential of the ECHO project.

A launch is being planned which will see the development of a not-for-profit company, managed by the key stakeholders, which will provide direction, governance and some administrative support for ECHO. Its initial task will be to scope out the project detail, formalise the ECHO technical solution and then begin the role out to “connect” ARCs to emergency service control rooms.

The service is expected to be subscription-based, calculated annually on the number of unique reference numbers (URNs) managed by ARCs. This will ensure the operation of ECHO can be sustained year on year, consistently delivered by industry partners.