

### *Emergency Telephone Number*

I think the value of one emergency telephone number is obvious. In any emergency, time is of crucial importance. In trying to get an ambulance, for example, or police, one uses the nearest telephone as the medium of communication. The injured or other person involved in an emergency who is trying to use that telephone most likely does not know immediately the number to call. He or she, even if a telephone book is available, wastes precious moments looking for the number while injury worsens or flames mount.

Moreover, the person trying to call must first find a ten cent coin which he or she may not have. He may come from another city, where a different emergency call system is in force. He may, in many cities, succeed in reaching the operator and say, "This is an emergency," and the operator will attempt to contact the right source of aid. But this takes time, Mr. Speaker, time which in many emergencies is vital to life or property. Hence, I urge the adoption of the one universally established and used emergency telephone number. This would be a success.

In Canada, Mr. Speaker, the Bell Telephone Company has already reserved the universal number 911 in many places where that company operates. Also, there are at this time six centres operating on the universal 911 number. Four of these are in Alberta, one is in St. John's, Newfoundland and one in Fredericton. Bell Telephone also plans to end the practice of requiring a person to use a coin in order to call the operator or to use the 911 number. According to what I was told yesterday, this is in the works for the future. There are, however, other telephone companies. I have a list of some of them. They use a different system for calling emergency help. Some companies draw little pictures in the telephone books they publish; others, in their telephone books, leave blank spaces in which one can fill in emergency telephone numbers.

The purpose of the bill before us is to amend the National Transportation Act and to provide, by law, for the establishment of the one universal emergency reporting telephone number. If this is to be done, it will require the co-operation of all telephone companies and of all the centres in which the universal number is to be established. In turn, this will mean that those centres of population will have to provide the central agency from which all types of aid can be summoned and relayed. Hence, while I am confident that what is aimed at will appeal to hon. members, yet, even as the author of this proposal, I am sure that the most that we can do at this stage, is allow the subject matter of the bill to go to an appropriate committee of the House where it may be discussed and, no doubt, improved and where witnesses can be heard as to the practicality of what is proposed.

● (1610)

There is no doubt in my mind that by degrees a universal emergency telephone number system is coming. Indeed, it is already in effect in hundreds of areas in North America. To ensure its fullest success, it should be universally known and used. It should be as universally communicated as the illustrated highway signs in North America indicating a hill, or a low bridge or a curve. I urge hon. members to allow the subject matter of the bill to proceed to a committee.

[Mr. Mather.]

**Mr. Paul McRae (Fort William):** Mr. Speaker, there is no question there is a serious need for a 911 number or other emergency number with which everyone in this country is familiar, so that in an emergency they could get help quickly. This emergency number system should be set up in such a way that a person who does not happen to have a dime could make his call. The government supports the intent of this measure and I believe it is a good thing we should be talking about it this afternoon and supporting it.

There are, however, some difficulties attached to setting up such a system. One of the results of this debate may be to push the communications industry into moving forward a little faster. The telephone companies have been in consultation with the government about the establishment of the 911 number and the conclusion has been reached that certain far-reaching developments are required in close co-operation with all the municipalities concerned. First, a central organization needs to be established by the municipalities concerned and adequate manning of the emergency facilities arranged. In some cities this is already being done. London and Toronto, I understand, have already done so.

The number 911 has been used and other numbers have been employed in various cities. In cities which have not established reporting centres one can, of course, dial emergency centres such as police and fire brigade separately. Once again, delay arises because the user must pick up a directory and look up a number. We all know that it is sometimes not possible to find a directory at hand. This applies particularly to pay phones. There is no question that a universally recognized number such as 911 would be much more convenient.

As I have indicated, some problems have been brought to my attention. Emergency systems, if they are to work, must be simple in operation and combined in a pre-determined network which assures the calling party of reaching the desired emergency control centre with minimum effort and a high degree of reliability. Unless the system is engineered and adapted to all types of switching centres, confusion will result due to different requirements in the territorial areas. We all recognize that different types of equipment are in use in different areas. This is one of the reasons for delay.

Emergency reporting necessitates reaching an interrogation centre where clearcut and appropriate questions can be asked to ensure rapid and correct dispatch of the appropriate people. In manually operated exchanges, a system for the centralization of emergency calls would be essential; trained personnel would accept the call and forward it for appropriate action. As hon. members know, there are still manually-operated exchanges in some parts of the country. In locations not equipped for direct distance dialling, some homing-in of emergency calls for appropriate forewarning is essential.

The question of responsibility for failure or errors is a serious one. Minimization of this potential would require an emergency network to be set up. Suppose a call is made in an emergency and the operator misinterprets it, fails to get the proper address or call back to the right number. Where does the responsibility lie? This is a matter which