

Crime Prevention

Text Alert System

Following a pilot project, a Text Alert scheme was launched in the Republic of Ireland in September, 2013 by An Garda Síochána (Police Force) with the support of a number of existing community networks including Community Alert, Neighbourhood Watch, the Irish Farmers Association and related stakeholders. The scheme provides a further mechanism by which An Garda Síochána can provide crime prevention information to community groups, who in turn will forward this information and advice by text or email to all members of the group in the community.

This initiative has developed as an important crime prevention mechanism with over 500 local groups involving in excess of 100,000 subscribers and with an estimated 200,000 text messages sent each month under the scheme. Every Garda Division, rural and urban, now offers the text alert service and An Garda Síochána have published guidelines to assist in the establishment and operation of local groups.

Text Alert enables communities to set up a group to receive alerts advising them of suspicious or criminal activity in their area. As well as ensuring awareness among users of the service, it can also lead to the reporting of suspicious activity to An Garda Síochána. Information sent by text can be rapidly distributed to a large amount of people in a cost effective way.

Text Alert is a one-way system, and operates on the following principles:

- Member(s) of the public reports incident to the Gardaí (24 hour Garda District -Telephone number is widely advertised).
- The reporting Garda verifies details and determines that the "Text Alert" system should be utilised.
- Garda sends text or e-mail out to each registered "Community Contact" in their Garda District.
- Each "Community Contact" forwards the text to their "Community Group" to advise the public to watch out and report any developments.

- If the information is received by e-mail the Community Contact may forward the e-mail or convert the content to SMS Text and send to their Community Group.

Each Text Alert group must satisfy certain scheme protocols before they can formally register with An Garda Síochána, and they may also have to raise finance to allow for dissemination of the received Garda Text through the employment of a Service Provider, if they so choose. This means that each of the 500 Text Alert groups must be well organised and is indicative of the demand for the service from An Garda Síochána.

The scheme has been very successful in increasing public awareness of crime prevention measures and in some cases it has been of direct assistance in the early detection of offences such as burglary.