

Apple launches satellite emergency SOS service in Australia and New Zealand

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Apple has launched a new emergency feature on all iPhone 14 models in Australia and New Zealand that enables users to message emergency services and alert family and friends if they're in strife, even when there is no phone reception. The Emergency SOS feature works by connecting directly to satellites located more than a 1,000km from Earth. iPhone 14 users can connect to the satellite by calling 000 in Australia, or 111 in New Zealand, and selecting the Emergency SOS button, or by holding the side button in tandem with the volume button. Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup The feature sends details of your emergency, location, iPhone battery level and Medical ID, if enabled, to Apple-trained emergency specialists who can communicate further via text with the person about their situation and whereabouts. And while it has long been a myth that holding your phone in the air in different directions can help you find a bar of reception, that's now a method that works with this feature. The user points their phone towards the sky and is guided by an interactive interface to find the satellite. The feature has already launched in the US, UK and parts of Europe. So far, it has saved the lives of 12 people. Last year, three students used the feature after they became trapped during a canyoning trip at a depth of 500 metres. With limited visibility of the sky, they managed to catch a satellite every 20 minutes to connect with emergency services. The response times vary, according to Apple, but can take as little as 15 seconds in clear conditions. Another two people were rescued using the feature after their car veered off a road in California and plunged into a canyon. The new Emergency SOS function can also alert parents, partners or friends. In an emergency situation, users can opt to send a transcript of their message exchange with the Apple-trained emergency to up to 10 emergency contacts. They can also use the satellite via the Find My app feature to reassure family and friends of their whereabouts even when there isn't an emergency – while trekking, for example. "Some of the most popular places to travel are off the beaten path and simply lack cellular coverage," said Greg Joswiak, Apple's senior vice president of Worldwide Marketing. "With Emergency SOS via satellite, the iPhone 14 lineup provides an indispensable tool that can get users the help they need while they are off the grid." John Walters, the president of the Rural Fire Service in Cobargo, said the feature might not have made a big difference during the black summer bushfires given the scale of the crisis and the thick blanket of smoke which likely blotted out the ability to connect with a satellite. Also, "the elephant in the room is also that not everyone has an iPhone 14", he said. But he said he can see situations where it could be a game-changer for people who are lost or injured in a remote area, or cases where a localised bushfire threatened someone's home. According to Apple, the new feature was set up with experts to set standard questions and protocols for when someone calls emergency services. "I

can imagine a lot of situations where it would be a very useful tool, such as a car breakdown on a lonely desert track, or in the high country where people get off the beaten track,” he said. A suite of existing Apple features has previously helped connect Australians with emergency services. Last year, an Adelaide man’s Apple watch called 000 on his behalf after the crash detection feature deduced he had been in a car accident. But, as the Guardian reported last year, iPhone’s have also mistakenly called emergency services from the pockets of people riding rollercoasters in the US, mistaking the bumps and jerks of the rides as car crashes.