



# Personal safety a top priority

GORDON SMITH reports on an Irish security company's new services that are aimed at improving people's safety through a technology-based personal alarm system

**P**ERHAPS it's the posters with faded old photos at this time of year more than at others that make us think of missing people. Public sympathy and attention focus closer still when such cases involve children. Then follows debate and discussion over how these incidents could be prevented or in some way anticipated. An Irish security firm has come up with a suite of technology-based personal alarm services aimed at allaying our fears, as well as those of people closest to us. On a practical level, it's hoped that in the best case, they will act as reassurance to people who would understandably worry about their loved ones. "The services are intended to give a degree of comfort to those who may be concerned about their friends or children," says Mark Gleeson, general manager of Top Security, which has launched the services that are intended to improve people's safety using a combination of mobile, landline and web technology, allowing friends or colleagues to be alerted in the event that a person doesn't arrive home when expected, or if they find themselves in a difficult situation. In the worst case where an alarm is triggered by a person's disappearance, there will be more accurate information with which to trace their whereabouts. "If somebody goes out at night and for whatever reason they don't come home, very often it'll be eight or nine the following morning before it will be noticed," Gleeson remarks. If the person doesn't come home as expected, a concerned parent or partner could go to the gardai with more concrete information, such as the last

time the person got into a taxi the previous night. "From a garda point of view, that's much more exact and direct information than starting at nine the following morning and saying 'we don't know where Johnny is': 12 or 14 hours might have elapsed by then," Gleeson notes.

Branded under the name TopLocate, the services are aimed at parents, the elderly, lone or shift workers, people who travel late at night, outdoor sports enthusiasts or just revellers who are out late at parties over the Christmas season.

The first of these services, TopLocate Home Safe, is intended for working parents of young families. In a typical scenario, children arriving home on their own from school would call a number and dial a code into their landline phone. If the code is not recorded on or before an agreed time such as 4pm, then an SMS or email alarm would be sent to the parents. The child isn't required to own a mobile and their location can be established by virtue of the fact that the call to deactivate the alarm is made from the house phone. If the child is at home but forgets to call the number, the alarm is also raised, but a simple call home would establish if their child is there. Home Safe costs €50 plus Vat per year and this includes all call charges.

TopLocate Mobile SOS is an add-on service to a person's mobile phone. Someone visiting an unusual or remote location can dial into Top Security's telecom system and record that event with a notification of when it is likely to finish. If this passes off safely, the user simply calls the number again to clear the alarm. If they don't clear the number in time, two people who have been previously nominated - typically a

family member and a friend - would be alerted. The service works across all networks and on all mobile phones and is priced at €80 plus Vat per year.

According to Gleeson, these services are exception-based and only raise the alarm in the event of a person not calling in. This means that others aren't bombarded constantly with texts or emails telling them that everything is normal, increasing the risk that they might ignore a genuine alarm call.

A third service, TopLocate Mobile Tracker, requires a GPS mobile phone, which is available from Top Security. This device functions as a panic alarm, with additional tracking and navigation features. By using GPS technology, the handset's location can be pinpointed on a web-based mapping service on a secure section of the TopLocate website. This is available only to people who have passwords and PIN codes. The service is the most expensive of the three at €195 plus Vat. The handset, a TWIG Discovery GPS phone, costs €400 plus Vat. According to TopSec, the device has a look and feel similar to that of a Nokia phone and will work on any of the Irish mobile networks.

More information on all of the services is available on a dedicated website at [www.toplocate.ie](http://www.toplocate.ie).

Gleeson stresses that there was no suggestion that any of the services could be used to track people covertly without their knowledge. "With first two services, they're totally driven and initiated by the user, there is no element of tracking whatsoever. With the Mobile Tracker, the ability to track is only given to a couple of people that the user wants - they have appointed two trusted people, whether they be family or colleagues at work," he points out. "Anyone carrying the GPS phone is

going to know they can be located - it's not like they're trying to hide it. This isn't clandestine in any way. You can't subscribe an ordinary phone to the tracker service and people wouldn't know."

Both the Mobile SOS and Mobile Tracker services allow the user to preset a button for use as a panic alarm, where an alert can be issued to two designated people to inform them if the person feels they are in some kind of dangerous or threatening situation. By pushing a designated key on the mobile, a Top Security number is called and the service begins recording what's happening. The concept behind this service is that if the person feels their safety would be in danger by making a proper call, the designated key is intended to raise an alarm more discreetly, as it could be done without removing the mobile phone from a pocket or bag.

The services were almost a year in development. Based on research the company conducted before launch, Top Security is anticipating good demand for them. "We would expect an initial take-up of several thousand and I think it will develop a momentum after that," Gleeson says. Although from a marketing perspective the company might argue otherwise, the nature of the service is such that it's to be hoped that we hear little more about it - suggesting that it will have done its job and helped more people to feel secure.

