

## ***Advice to clients of registered firms regarding the implementation of 21CN.***

### **1 Introduction to 21CN**

You may have heard that BT has begun a programme to upgrade the telephone system infrastructure in the UK. This programme is called “21CN”, standing for “Twenty-first Century Network”. Customers that make use of BT and other service providers that use the BT infrastructure will be switched over to the new network over a period of time. This process has already begun, starting with the South Wales area. Once your telephone system has been changed over, you are unlikely to notice any difference at all to your normal telephone calls. However, there are two factors of which you should be aware. Firstly, switchover will involve a brief loss of service at the time it is carried out, and secondly, there is a possibility that the new network may not be fully compatible with certain types of non-voice equipment connected to your line, including alarm signalling equipment. It is understood that other providers of communications services will be making similar changes, so you could be affected even if you are not a BT client.

### **2 How am I affected?**

If your system is of the audible alarm only type, then you will not be affected, but if your alarm is linked to a monitoring service such as an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) then you may be affected. Tests have shown that only a minority of systems are affected, but if any problems occur, they may be when your local exchange is switched over or possibly when the exchanges serving your ARC is switched over. You are advised to contact your alarm system maintenance contractor to establish what type of equipment is installed and whether it will need attention or upgrading to maintain its integrity. You are advised to discuss this with your alarm company at the earliest opportunity to ensure that any possible problems are anticipated and resolved before BT makes the switchover.

### **3 What sort of problems may be experienced?**

During the switchover, neither you nor your alarm system will be able to make calls for a period of up to three minutes (estimated). You will also be unable to receive calls for a period of up to 30 minutes. Your alarm system may be set up to recognise this as a “line fault” and may sound a local buzzer to notify you. At this point you will be unable to contact the ARC or the alarm company unless you do this by mobile phone. Please be aware that for some high security systems, the ARC may try to contact you in the event of line fault, and

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if they are unable to do this the fault could result in the police being called. Unfortunately, this is likely to be counted as a false alarm under police rules. Your ARC will be making strenuous efforts to mitigate such calls at switchover, but you are advised to ensure that they have a mobile number to contact you or other keyholders.

### **4 What happens after the switchover?**

If you are unlucky enough to be adversely affected by these changes, then there are two most likely scenarios indicated by the tests so far (although others are not ruled out). The problems mainly relate to extremely small delays in the transmission times, which are unnoticeable during voice calls but which can affect highly sensitive alarm transmitters.

1. The alarm system may be unable to contact the ARC at all.  
Under these conditions the police will not be called.
2. The alarm system will make contact with the ARC, but will not recognise the ARC acknowledgement signal and will think its call has failed, whereupon it will repeatedly try to reconnect to the ARC. The second possibility can give rise to multiple call attempts reflected in a higher than normal phone bill

Because these differences in timing are very slight and can vary over time, the effects of the problem may appear to be random. In some cases the alarm will be able to notify you there is a problem but many cannot and you are urged to discuss your system with your installer/maintainer as soon as possible to ensure continued protection. A system that is not fully functioning may invalidate your insurance cover should an incident occur and the system not perform as originally intended.

The alarm industry has worked hard with BT to address the issues in this document, but we emphasise that the changes are occurring due to BT's decision to upgrade the national telephone infrastructure.

### **5 Where can I learn more about this?**

Speak to your alarm company and visit the following websites.

[www.btplc.com/21CN/index.htm](http://www.btplc.com/21CN/index.htm)

[www.switchedonuk.org/](http://www.switchedonuk.org/)

[www.bsia.co.uk/21cn](http://www.bsia.co.uk/21cn)

#### *Note*

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