

How Helpful are Delhi's Helplines?

1. Introduction

A large number of phone helpline numbers are in operation by various departments and agencies of the government. We did a quick study of the effectiveness and efficiency of these helplines in Delhi.

2. Method of Study

From the Government websites and newspapers we found 21 helpline numbers. Some numbers are for specific target group, such as children, women, elder citizens, etc some others are for specific activities like crime, traffic, pollution etc. Each helpline was called thrice during July 2009 and the response/no response was recorded and analysed on various parameters like cooperativeness, general level of awareness of the duties, time taken to respond to the queries, and the tone of the language used.

The results of the study are tabulated below. The first thing to note is that there too many different helpline numbers, almost impossible for any citizen to keep track or remember. It would be more effective as well as convenient if there were one single number or a small number of numbers as per the type of help. As with too many cooks and food, too many helpline numbers undermine the main purpose. Several of the numbers worked well, the response was courteous and to the point and there was proper follow-up too. Many numbers were difficult to get through despite repeated attempts, in some cases the respondents were not clear about their role or how to guide the caller, and some were downright ignorant and rude. The *Traffic Helpline* respondent insisted that the caller speak in Hindi and refused to answer any query in English. In such a situation, what do non-Hindi speakers in Delhi do?

Delhi Citizen Handbook 2009

Group/Department	Helpline Number	Observations	
		Positives	Problems
Children	1098	Highly cooperative, helpful and willing to hear queries	Non-reachable at times
Women	1091 23370597, 23379181, 23370557	Among all general complaints, mostly the rape related ones were well attended	No reply twice out of the three times; Tone of the attendant is discouraging for the caller
Elder Citizens	1091, 1291	Did answer	Not at all helpful; Did not know their jurisdiction of services; Highly discouraging
Inform about Crime	1090		No reply
Traffic	23010101	Clearly knew which queries to entertain	Do not have a proper mechanism for the caller to check whether action has been taken on the complaint made (no complaint number given); Refusal to entertain any caller if the language used is not Hindi;
Vigilance Cell	23213355	Answered the call promptly; respondent knew channel of hierarchy in the Cell	The call attendant did not know how to file complaints, where to forward/direct the caller and what their duties are.
Anti-corruption Cell	23890018 23890019	Same as above	Same as above
Hospital	1800-11-3300	Call attended at the earliest	Highly confused attendants with regard to what is to be done with each caller
Disaster Management	1077	Call attended at the earliest and never unavailable; Very efficient and effective	
Delhi Pollution Control Committee	23869389		No Reply
Transport Lost and Found	24351763, 9718190047	Clear about their duties	Not conversant with English at all, a problem for tourists
DTC Pollution Control Cell	28892006	Phone answered after some attempts	Did not know what is to be done
Food and Supplies Department	23370841	Did answer after several tries	Scandalises and discourages the caller; Unclear and unwilling to take action; Not reachable most of the times
<i>Lokayukta</i>	23370100	Did answer	They believe that citizens must not contact them but rather go to the PGC (Public Grievances Commission)

- Prepared by Cheistha Kochhar (student of BA Economics Honours, Sri Venkateswara College, Delhi University)