

Technical safeguarding (TecSAFE) application for vulnerable victims

A mobile safeguarding tool, designed to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse (DA), stalking, harassment and other related offences.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Violence (other) Public protection, safeguarding and vulnerability Child sexual exploitation (CSE)
Organisation	North Wales Police Police Digital Service
Contact	- Lois Edwards-Hughes - lois.edwards-hughes@northwales.police.uk - Craig Downham - craig.downham@pds.police.uk
Region	Wales
Partners	Police Government department Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2023
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Adults Children and young people Victims Women

Aim

The aim of the technical safeguarding (TecSAFE) application for vulnerable victims is to:

- protect and support victims of domestic abuse (DA), stalking, harassment and other forms of violence
- provide victims with access to emergency support through a mobile app or handset
- safeguard victims and responding officers by identifying risks associated with perpetrators

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of TecSAFE are to:

- improve the safety of victims when contacting the police during an emergency
- increase reassurance for victims and officers
- improve the force's response to victims who activate TecSAFE

Description

North Wales Police conducted a review and identified a need for additional support for individuals at risk of domestic abuse (DA). In response, the force approached the Police Digital Service (PDS)

to explore the use of TecSAFE as an enhanced safeguarding tool for victims of DA.

Onboarding process

During the onboarding process, North Wales Police was assigned a TecSAFE manager who worked closely with the force's single point of contact. The onboarding process included:

- training and system access
- data protection compliance
- contract and financial arrangements

Training

North Wales Police were provided with two types of training sessions:

- Training for vulnerability units on the covert mobile app and handsets – a 90-minute in-person session delivered by the TecSAFE manager. The training covers how to set up new users and an overview of using TecSAFE as a safeguarding tool.
- Force control room (FCR) training – one-hour training session (in person or online) focusing on how to respond to a TecSAFE activation and how to use the tracking and intelligence platform to its full potential to support users during an incident.

By providing onboarding support, PDS has enabled North Wales Police to deliver timely, technology-driven safeguarding interventions for those most at risk of DA.

Post-onboarding, PDS has continued to provide ongoing support through guidance, refresher training, and an on-call service for both urgent and non-urgent assistance.

Implementation

North Wales Police adopted TecSAFE in October 2023 to enhance protection for those at risk, including survivors of DA.

Users are provided with either a handset or a licence for an app that can be downloaded on their smartphone. All users receive initial in-person training on when and how to use TecSAFE. The handsets and licences are available in 43 languages and include accessibility features to support users with additional needs.

Once activated, the handset or licence allows the user to make an emergency TecSAFE call at any time. Calls are routed directly to the force control room (FCR). While the call is underway, the TecSAFE tracking platform uses the following strongest available signal formats to locate users:

- northing and easting coordinates
- Wi-Fi
- geolocation
- global positioning system (GPS)

Due to North Wales' predominantly rural landscape, TecSAFE's location-tracking capabilities provide the FCR and first responders with an accurate location reference. The FCR also records the individual's details and telephone number on the computer-aided dispatch and records management systems.

All users are required to sign a declaration reminding them to keep their phone charged, maintain signal and credit, and carry their phone with them at all times.

Cost and licenses

North Wales Police currently hold 50 licences and 10 devices. 35 to 40 licences and five devices are typically active at any given time. The annual cost of a licence is under £100, while a handset costs below £150. Licence contracts are for 24 months, while handset contracts are for 12 months. The initiative is funded through the force's crime services and protecting vulnerable persons budget.

Overall impact

Since October 2023, North Wales Police have issued 63 licenses and seven handsets to individuals at risk of DA. Some at-risk categories include:

- 'honour'-based abuse
- stalking and harassment
- serious sexual assault
- forced marriage

While TecSAFE has been used predominately with female victims and survivors, there have been two male users.

Users have provided the following feedback:

- “I’ve used this solution. It’s very discrete and did help me with feeling safe”.
- “I had a house alarm previously, but I was always afraid to leave home. Now I can do normal things, like take my kids to school, something I’ll never take for granted again”.

Learning

- Use of TecSAFE varies across different areas of North Wales. To address this, the force has identified super-users and single points of contact (SPOCs) to deliver refresher training and provide ongoing support.
- While the initiative can offer reassurance to victims and survivors of domestic abuse, it also provides officers with confidence that they have implemented an additional layer of safeguarding for vulnerable individuals.
- Staff turnover and evolving technology present challenges, however the TecSAFE manager can provide ongoing training and guidance to help maintain continuity.
- TecSAFE was originally designed to support high-risk victims of domestic abuse. Over time, the service has evolved to support a wider range of individuals at risk, including vulnerable witnesses, those at risk of harm outside a domestic abuse context and people requiring enhanced safeguarding measures.

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