

Amex starts scheme to aid travellers

By SIMON MACKLIN

AMERICAN Express launched a new travel assistance scheme yesterday in the ongoing battle between credit-card companies bidding for customers.

John Verco, vice-president for marketing and sales, east Asia and north Pacific, said that Amex currently has more than 300,000 card holders in Hongkong after double-figure growth rates over the past few years.

The new program, Global Assist, an emergency medical and legal referral and assistance service, will be available to all Hongkong holders of Amex cards while travelling abroad.

The scheme is offered in two parts:

- A round-the-clock emergency telephone service offering free medical and legal referral.

- "Assistance Services" providing practical medical and legal help, including repatriation where necessary, and transport to medical centres. This will cost HK\$600 a year for an individual and HK\$900 for family cover.

Mr Verco said that the new service means card holders will be able to telephone collect to an "alarm centre" in Hongkong and request

medical or legal assistance referrals.

The caller will be put in contact with lawyers, doctors, dentists, pharmacists and local interpreters wherever he is in the world.

The phone will be answered in either English, Cantonese or Mandarin, whichever language the caller chooses, and he will be put in touch with professionals and interpreters who speak his mother tongue.

Richard Weden, vice-president and general manager, east Asia and North Pacific, for Amex's Travel Related Services, said the aim was to give customers peace of mind when travelling.

He pointed out that, while the company would provide a number of sophisticated medical services under the scheme, the card holder would be billed for these once he or she returned to Hongkong.

Amex would, if necessary, arrange for special medical teams to fly out to meet a patient if it was thought the patient was not fit to travel, but again the customer would have to bear the cost once back in Hongkong.