

CUSTOMER SERVICE GUARANTEE STRENGTHENED

The Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) has been strengthened by a series of measures announced recently by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Helen Coonan.

The CSG is a key consumer

safeguard, introduced in 1998, to ensure consumers can have their phones connected and repaired on time. It provides for penalties to be paid directly to the affected customer if a service is not connected or repaired within the set timeframes.

These penalties have been increased by 21 per cent, which means, for example, that if a customer's telephone fault is not fixed on time, they will be paid up to \$48.40 per day for every day it takes to repair by their telecommunications service provider.

While CSG compliance rates have been consistently above the 90 per cent level that ACMA considers satisfactory, these changes provide additional incentives for service providers to maintain or improve their performance, and give consumers a

more appropriate level of compensation if they fail to do so.

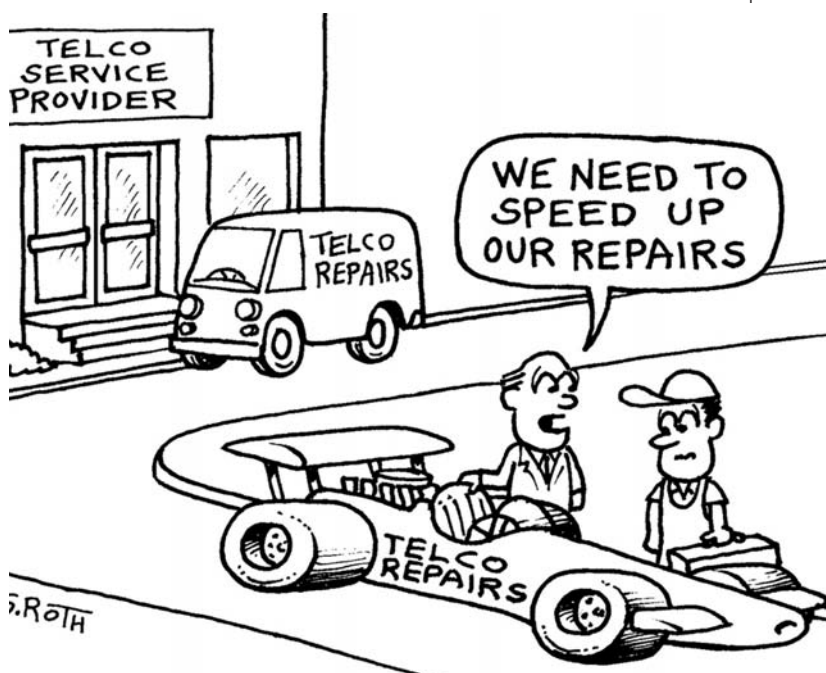
The industry exemption arrangements have also been tightened to ensure that service providers will not be exempt from the CSG timeframes in the case of predictable weather events. There will now be set criteria to clearly define the circumstances under which a provider can claim an exemption, known as a mass service disruption, for unpredictable weather events. A mass service disruption may occur if natural disasters or extreme weather

conditions create faults and prevent a service provider from repairing those faults on time. In these circumstances, the CSG timeframes for the connection and repair of services are suspended.

Service providers will now only be able to claim CSG exemptions because of weather conditions if they meet strict criteria based on standards used by the Bureau of Meteorology. The set criteria for extreme weather include objective definitions for events such as heavy rainfall, flash flooding, hail and hazardous winds. For example, service providers claiming a CSG exemption for heavy rainfall must now prove, using documentary evidence, that the rainfall exceeded the 10-year average recurrence interval, that is, an event that would occur, on average, only once in a decade. This measure also encourages service providers to take reasonable measures to prevent or mitigate outages caused by routine weather events and improve services in areas prone to weather-related outages.

The changes are in the *Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Direction No. 1 of 1999 (Amendment No. 1 of 2006)*, which is on the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts website at www.dcit.gov.au/tel/legislation/other_legislative_instruments.

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SpamMATTERS takes off



spamMATTERS

In the three months since ACMA officially launched the SpamMATTERS spam reporting 'button', there have been more than seven million reports of spam from the general public. Since the launch on 30 May 2006, more than 102,000 individual submitters have reported spam using the button.

The SpamMATTERS button or 'plug-in' can be downloaded from the ACMA website at www.spam.acma.gov.au. It is available for use with the Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express email programs. Telstra has also incorporated a version of the button into its WebMail service.

One of the main benefits of SpamMATTERS is that it enables the capture of spam that has bypassed spam filters and anti-spam programs. It is spam that has arrived in a customer's email in-box that the customer considers to be spam, rather than spam identified automatically through a computer algorithm. This

means that while the spam in the SpamMATTERS system does not represent all email spam in circulation, it includes spam that is often the most problematic, such as 'phishing' spam.

The SpamMATTERS forensic system identifies spam campaigns. The predominant campaigns identified since the launch are those involving pharmaceutical spam (spam which often advertises prescription-only medicines available over the internet) and banking scam phishing campaigns. Information from these campaigns is being shared with Australian law-enforcement authorities and overseas regulators. ACMA has received advice that spammers operating outside Australia have been shut down based on information provided from the SpamMatters system.