

Back to school for tips on safe mobile phone use

As part of its responsibility for regulation of internet content, ACMA is working with the Curriculum Corporation to inform parents about the safe use of mobile phones by children.

The benefits of being able to access the internet from mobile phones bring with them new concerns about the potential risks posed to children. These include accessing adult content such as pornography and 'stranger danger' contact in chat services.

A poster is being distributed that includes a 12-point checklist geared towards parents of primary and secondary school children, specifically those aged 8–14 years. Developed in collaboration with the children's

internet charity, Childnet International, the checklist offers comprehensive information, independent advice and practical tips. It guides parents on what they should consider when choosing a mobile for their child, what features and functions to look for, and how to ensure appropriate safety measures are in place.

Apart from the standard questions about costs and charges, and pre-paid versus fixed-term plans, parents are also encouraged to ask mobile phone service providers about:

- internet access
- international and premium rate services
- chat services
- making complaints

- dealing with content that is unsuitable for children
- nuisance or malicious calls
- unsolicited text messages or emails
- Bluetooth-enabled mobiles and
- preventing handset loss.

Mobile phone service providers in Australia have recognised the risks posed by harmful content accessible from mobile phones and have developed information to help parents protect their children. This information is on the website of the Australian Mobile

Telecommunications Association at www.amta.org.au (Consumer Tips).

The Mobile phones – child safety checklist is on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au/mobilesforkids.



their obligations—legislative, regulatory and co-regulatory. To make this compliance work transparent to both industry and consumers, last year we published the approach we intend to take to code compliance.

ACMA has various enforcement options under the legislation. The flexibility of these allows us to deal appropriately with various compliance scenarios, from the unintentional breach to systemic abuses. In general, if a regulatory breach has occurred we will, within the limits of our power, take regulatory action commensurate with the seriousness of the breach.

Our initial approach tends to be to negotiate and resolve the matter without resorting to formal procedures. If this is unsuccessful, we take appropriate enforcement action. Our response to evidence of systemic failures to comply will be stronger than against an isolated breach. But this graduated approach is almost never appropriate when serious criminal offences are involved, where there are public security or safety issues

in play or where the impact on consumers is substantial or widespread.

An example is the work we do to ensure the integrity of the TIO scheme, including requiring service providers to be members of the scheme and to comply fully with its requirements. We recently issued a direction to Prodigy Telecom to join the TIO scheme, giving it 21 days to join. If Prodigy fails to join within this time, ACMA may seek a pecuniary penalty through the Federal Court.

The new arrangements for managing information in the IPND are a recent example of our consumer protection work. The arrangements include a scheme that establishes a 'gatekeeper' role for ACMA and registration of a revised industry code, to ensure that IPND data is used and disclosed only for authorised and approved purposes. The IPND Code aligns industry practices with the requirements of the Act and the IPND Scheme, and establishes processes for data providers, data users and the IPND Manager that

promote the integrity of IPND data.

We recently amended the Telecommunications Numbering Plan to create new possibilities for industry and consumers through the introduction of the 0550 number range for location-independent voice telephony services. Service providers wishing to offer a VoIP service similar to the traditional fixed telephone service will still be able to use geographic numbers for their services, or they can choose to use the new 0550 range. Where VoIP services are provided on geographic numbers, we will actively monitor compliance with fixed telephone service legislative and regulatory obligations. The introduction of a new number range, together with more targeted enforcement of legislative and regulatory obligations, provides a balance between facilitating innovation and protecting consumers.

ACMA generally tries to steer a course between keeping a watchful eye on the market and acting quickly and effectively in the event of an obvious failure to rectify

breaches of the regulations. In all our undertakings and the discharge of our responsibilities, we strive to be an 'evidence-based' regulator, making decisions on the basis of robust and credible knowledge.

Increasing that knowledge base depends on you. We need your input—read the media releases, subscribe to *ACMAsphere*, participate in self-regulatory processes, respond to discussion papers. Empowering consumers to better understand and utilise their communication rights requires open, honest, full duplex communication, cooperation, consultation and collaboration between all parties—government, regulators, industry, self-regulatory bodies and consumers. Only then can we have the two-way information exchange—being heard and being informed—that ensures real consumer choice and easily accessible consumer protection.

The full text of Ms Plante's speech is on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to Home > About ACMA: News & media centre > Speeches).