

Telstra CDMA survey hits the road

The survey of Telstra's CDMA mobile phone coverage began in December 2006 with a verification survey in southern Victoria.

Telstra's proposed 3G network is expected to provide extensive and enhanced voice, data and next generation services over a wide area of Australia, and the CDMA survey is the first stage of an auditing process to ensure that the coverage provided by the new network is the same as, or better than, that provided by the existing CDMA system. A second survey of Telstra's new 3G network (otherwise known as Wideband CDMA and marketed by Telstra as Next-G) will be carried out later in 2007.

ACMA is working closely with the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Telstra and the selected contractor, Melbourne-based Zamro International Pty Ltd, to progress the

coverage survey and allow a smooth transition to the new network.

The recent verification involved Zamro equipping a test vehicle with specialised mobile phone survey equipment to demonstrate the company's capabilities to ACMA. After field trials and sign-off by ACMA, Zamro set off in January 2007 on a representative route set by ACMA to verify the coverage of Telstra's CDMA network. ACMA will monitor the survey's progress.

ACMA released a request for tender in October 2006 seeking a contractor to carry out the

benchmarking survey of Telstra's existing CDMA mobile phone coverage in early 2007, followed by a survey of Telstra's proposed WCDMA network coverage in late 2007.

Telstra does not intend to decommission the CDMA system until 3G coverage and services are the same or better, and not before 28 January 2008, even if the same coverage is achieved earlier.

Zamro specialises in mobile phone base station and other telecommunications installation projects for telecommunications carriers, and has conducted

benchmarking surveys similar to that required by ACMA. The tender response received from Zamro sets out a detailed survey test procedure along with appropriate test equipment calibration procedures and audit trail for data collection and processing.

ACMA will analyse the results of the two surveys and make an assessment of the extent of coverage provided, with particular reference to rural and remote areas. The results are expected to be finalised by December 2007 with a report to the minister.

Consumers to benefit from higher CSG compensation and tougher exemptions

Changes to the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) Standard will benefit customers of fixed telephone services across Australia, while giving service providers clear service guidelines. ACMA has increased the compensation payable to customers for CSG breaches for the first time since 1998 and has limited the eligibility of service providers to seek exemptions from mandatory timeframes for service repair or connection due to extreme weather conditions.

The compensation payments were increased by approximately 21 per cent, in line with inflation. Residential customers will now receive daily compensation of \$14.52 up until the sixth day of delay, when compensation increases to \$48.40 a day. Businesses receive \$24.20, then \$48.40 daily.

The changes also reduce the ability of service providers to claim for exemption in cases of predictable weather events and require them to provide documentary evidence to

substantiate claims for exemptions due to extreme weather events. The CSG Standard now provides criteria that must be met for an exemption to be claimed for 'extreme weather conditions'—large hail, heavy rainfall, flash floods, hazardous winds, lightning, blizzards, tornadoes, large waves and storm tides. Definitions have also been added for what constitutes a 'reasonable offer' and 'sufficient information' where an interim or alternative service is offered to customers.

ACMA monitors service provider performance against the CSG Standard, which requires providers of fixed telephone services to connect and repair these services within maximum timeframes, unless there are circumstances beyond its control, such as a natural disaster. The CSG Standard does not apply to customers or customer equipment with more than five lines, or to mobile phone services.

The amendment standard and associated explanatory statement are on the ACMA website.

