Natural disasters and extreme weather delay landline repairs, connections

04 June 2013

Twenty-three service providers have notified the TIO about exemptions to complying with legislative timeframes to connect or repair landline services in the first nine months of 2012-13.

Required repair and connection times for landlines are set out in the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) Standard. Depending on the remoteness and size of a place where a repair or a connection is needed these times can be from two to 20 working days.

If a provider does not repair a fault or connect a new service within those times, it may have to pay a consumer a small amount of compensation starting at $14.52 for residential customers and $24.20 for business customers per working day.

Exemptions from the CSG Standard

When natural disasters or extreme weather cause problems for many consumers in an area, providers can claim an exemption from the CSG Standard. These are known as Mass Service Disruptions (MSDs).

In some cases, the extent can be such that the provider might claim an exemption because it has to move staff or equipment from a non-affected area to restore services somewhere else.

Providers must tell their affected customers about an MSD either individually or by publishing a notice in a newspaper. They must also forward those notices to the TIO and the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

Resellers must also do this, even if their wholesaler has already published a notice. We have been actively reminding providers of these obligations over the last year.

Telstra, as the universal service provider, has an obligation to provide alternative services to its Priority Assistance Customers even when an MSD is declared. Priority Assistance Customers are people with diagnosed life-threatening conditions that need access to a working landline service.

Mass service disruptions in 2013

There have been 585 MSDs declared by 23 providers in Australia so far in the 2012-13 financial year — almost 100 more than for all of 2011-12. Some of those exemptions were extended up to four months and were applied to large or densely populated areas, including capital cities.

For example, an exemption that covered metropolitan Melbourne and Western Victorian districts was declared from 8 to 29 March, and extended to 31 May. The disruption to services was attributed to the redeployment of technicians to service flood-affected areas in New South Wales and Queensland.

Another MSD that covered Metropolitan Sydney, Greater Sydney, Hunter, Central Tablelands and Illawarra districts in New South Wales was declared due to heavy rains and flooding from 29 January to 1 March. It was extended to 3 May.

Tasmania has also been covered by exemptions, one due to the effects of bushfires in early January. A more recent exemption was declared for the whole state due to damaging winds.

How the TIO can help

If a consumer calls us about a fault or connection problem directly caused by an MSD-related issue, there may be limits to how we can help. We will give consumers information about the MSD, and tell them to contact us again if their service isn't repaired or connected after the exemption expires.

If the MSD doesn't comply with the standard or the consumer has other issues they are calling us about, we can generally deal with the complaint. For example, we will look into complaints about missed appointments, or about providers asking for payment for services that consumers couldn't use at all.

There were 1,114 new complaints made in January-March 2013 about faulty landlines that were fully unusable — almost double the number we received the previous quarter.

Recent Posts:

- Natural disasters and extreme weather delay landline repairs, connections
- Complaint statistics January-March 2013
- Time limits expanded
- TIO monitors misleading telemarketing practices
- TIO helps financial counsellors decipher the telco code

Faulty landlines

The owner of a telemarketing business contacted us to make a compensation claim for lost profit.

Related Information
ACMA fact sheets
Communications Alliance
Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

Next step?
make an online complaint
1800 062 058
Write
PO Box 276
Collins Street West Vic 8007
Visit
Level 3, 595 Collins Street
Melbourne
TTY
1800 675 692
National Relay Service
Call on 1800 555 677 then ask for 1800 062 058
Fax our consumer complaint form to
1800 630 614

© 2013, Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman