

EXICOM TELEPHONES.

With the onset of the "wet" season in Northern Australia it has become apparent that we are having a significantly higher fault rate with T 200 telephones that would have been normally expected. The problem was first apparent in Darwin but it has been closely followed by Cairns and Townsville. Over the past weeks the problem has reached Southern Queensland.

The most common fault is line looping which can either be permanent or intermittent. A related problem is that the phone loops the line after a single burst of ring. The called party has not answered but the phone is off the hook and sometimes the calling party can hear all activity at the called end. In this case the call would also appear on the billing record as a short duration call. Breakthrough Billing have been informed of this possibility.

Tests were carried out by TRL and the problem isolated to the Exicom flexible keypad circuit layers which were manufactured after week 7 of 1993. Exicom are the sole supplier of Serial 550/141 "tropicalised" telephones which are treated with conformal coating and these phones are deployed in areas of high humidity. High humidity is the specific condition most likely to bring about the fault. Therefore in areas of high humidity we have a potential major fault problem.

DEPLOYMENT.

Whilst I do not have the total deployment of Exicom phones available it has been assessed that there is approximately 450,000 phones with potential faults. Of these there are 325,000 Serial 550/141 phones deployed in areas of high moisture. Approximate deployment of the Serial 550/141 phones since April 1993 is:

Queensland	225000
Darwin	9000
Western Australia	90000

In these areas virtually all T200's installed or used as replacements during maintenance have a potential problem. In addition there are some 125000 in other areas.

IMPACT.

Darwin.

The problems in Darwin have been addressed. Since December no more Exicom phones have been used. All supplies have been sourced from Alcatel and whilst these do not have the conformal coating tests indicate that they are performing satisfactorily. Whilst there are still phones in-situ with potential defects the situation is considered manageable.

Queensland.

The Queensland situation is very serious. The situation has progressively worsened as the wet has moved south. It has significantly worsened over the past two weeks as cyclone Rewa has moved off the Queensland Coast and brought with it very heavy storm activity and high moisture conditions. The effect in Queensland is that in January we are experiencing the need to replace phones at the rate of 12000 a month compared to the expected 8500. Under the present Union agreements each of these replacements require a visit by field staff.

In Queensland we have taken the following actions:

1. Following the success of the trial of the Alcatel phone in Darwin, supplies of Exicom phones to Queensland have ceased and all further phones used will be sourced from Alcatel. Because of the supply problems Exicom phones will still have to be deployed in areas of lower moisture risk.
2. We still have a heavy backlog of work due to the impact of Cyclone Rewa. Staff have been recalled on duty and over the weekend we have loaned all available staff from C & G, Psy phones, CED to work with the SDU to replace telephones. Whilst this may overcome the present problem it does not offer a sustainable long term solution.

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3. We have set up discussions with the CWU with the view of implementing any of the following:

- Use of Fixed Term employees for three months
- Use of Couriers to deliver phones where the fault is diagnosed as being in the phone.
- Use of contract labour.

All these actions are costly in terms of SDU expenses . The recently completed Mercer Study estimates that the cost of a visit is \$237. No allowance has been made for this activity in the SDU budget..

With the Ballot due in March we must address the problem as aggressively as possible. Consideration should also be given to seeking compensation from TT or Exdcom.

Western Australia.

The heavy population areas in WA are in the South and traditionally the weather is not expected to effect these areas until February or March. We are arranging for Alcatel phones to be supplied to northern areas.

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