

Samsung Mobile Phone Device Issue

Briefing for Triple Zero Service Outage Parliamentary Inquiry

Hearing of 3 November 2025

What is the issue?

1. As we understand it, when this group of mobile phone devices was being finalised for supply to the Australian market, a decision was made to embed certain settings in their firmware by Samsung to address the fact that at the time, Vodafone only had a 3G network in Australia, whereas Telstra and Optus networks had both 3G and 4G capability.

Note: in broad terms, firmware helps devices boot up and communicate, software is focused more on user interaction.

2. The settings were such that when the device was looking for a Vodafone (now TPG Telecom) network for a triple zero call, it was in effect hard coded to only look for a 3G network.
3. We understand the firmware only related to triple zero calling, calls to other numbers were not affected.
4. Vodafone's mobile network didn't get 4G capability until about 2021, many years after the others were 4G capable.
5. The issue with putting the settings in the firmware was that once Vodafone's 3G network was shutdown, the devices would not find a network and triple zero calls would fail.
6. For consumers with these devices, we understand that the issue will manifest as follows:-
 - a. Customers where TPG Telecom's network is their home network will not be able to get through to triple zero on these devices at all;
 - b. Customers where Telstra or Optus network is their home network will not be able to get through to triple zero where their home network:
 - i. Is not operating, and
 - ii. Either TPG's network is the only other operating network, or it and one other are operating but TPG's tower strength is stronger than the other operating network.
7. For a subset of the devices, doing a firmware update to the device would overcome the issue, allowing the device to connect to triple zero when needed.
8. We understand that the more common ways this difference in networks would be accommodated is through carrier settings on a device – it appears the unusual way this accommodation for Vodafone's network has contributed to both the problem and the fact there is no simple way to address it. Carrier settings can be updated by operators to reflect updates in their networks.

How many consumers are affected?

1. The latest data we have is that a total of 53,658 devices will need to be blocked as the nature of them eg age of the device or their remaining storage is such that firmware updates will not be possible.

2. This is broken down as follows:-

| | | |
|--------|--------|-----------------------------------|
| ██████ | ██████ | (Provided on Sunday 26 October) |
| TPG | 7,152 | (Provided on Saturday 25 October) |
| ██████ | ██████ | (Provided on Monday 27 October) |

3. These numbers include devices held by the mobile network operator's resellers.
4. The providers have already blocked or commenced the process to block these devices as required by their obligations under the ECSD.
5. There are a number of other Samsung device types in the market where there is no problem if the customer has already updated the firmware, or could do so. This would address the problem and avoid the customer needing to source a new mobile phone device.
6. The telcos are working to confirm the number of devices in this category, and put in place supports for customers to help them update the firmware if that is a solution. They will need to block any devices where the firmware is not updated to meet their obligations under the ECSD.

When did the ACMA find out about the issue?

1. We heard reports of a TPG telecom customer with a Samsung J2 device who was unable to call triple zero in the Wentworth falls area with indications that there were no outages on the TPG network at the relevant time.
2. On 3 October, Ms Rainsford wrote to the three mobile network operators to alert them that we had started hearing some concerning reports which raised questions about compliance with blocking requirements.

Note: there may be no causation between the correspondence at point 2 and the things which led to the actions outlined below.

3. On 20 October, a Telstra representative called Ms Rainsford just before midday to provide an overview of the issue and flag a meeting was being scheduled in the early afternoon to brief ACMA, the Department and the Minister's Office.
4. At about 12.40pm, the Minister's Chief of Staff contacted the acting Chair, Mr Suckling, to let him know that the Telstra CEO (Vicky Brady) had contacted the Minister that day to advise of this issue and to convey the MO's concern. Mr Suckling was able to advise we had been verbally briefed and a meeting was scheduled for early afternoon for a more in-depth briefing.
5. That meeting was held at 1.30pm on 20 October and Ms Rainsford participated from the ACMA. Other attendees were the Minister's Chief of Staff and media advisor, and the First Assistant Secretary of Communications Service and Consumer Division in the Department.
6. Following the meeting, Ms Rainsford briefed Authority members verbally at a meeting which started at 2.30pm on the same day.
7. Later that afternoon, further discussions were held bilaterally with ██████, ██████ and TPG Telecom representatives, as well as a further discussion with the Department.

What have we done about it?

1. We have worked with the telcos to understand their plans and next steps and confirm they understand their obligations about blocking. This has included a lot of engagement with MNOs as they continued their analysis to identify the number of affected devices, and the nature of those devices, so as to understand the likely extent of customer impact.
2. Telcos have confirmed that they have blocked or commenced the process for blocking devices where no update is possible.
3. We are separately working with telcos and device manufacturers to understand their actions to assist other customers for whom an update would avoid the need to block their device. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
4. We have also issued a request for information to Samsung to collect further information on the source of the issue and other matters related to where there might be indications of regulatory non-compliance.
5. We have also issued a request for information to TPG Telecom to collect information relevant to whether there is an indication it has not met its regulatory obligations.
6. We continue to work with telcos to understand their scoping of the impacted customers; plans to support those customers and timing around next steps.

Are there other devices likely to be in the same category?

1. We are not aware of any at the moment, but our inquiries of Samsung in particular are expected to help us identify if this is a broader issue.

Why would these devices still be in circulation?

1. Some people hold onto their phones for many years; some people bring phones with them from overseas when they come to live, work or travel here. With the rate of technological change, updates often need to be made to software to maintain the same capabilities and security. Sometimes these updates can be pushed or forced on the device, others require user action.
2. Also, stock can sit awaiting sale for some years – depending on how popular the device is and how well retailers have anticipated demand.
3. The relevant regulation at the supply end is a point in time supply point where certain assessments need to be done at the point where the devices are brought into Australia for commercial use – there is no requirement to re-assess at a later point.

What is the relevant emergency call regulation?

1. Under the Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Determination 2019, since 28 October 2024, telcos are required to, in effect, block mobile phone devices which would not be able to connect to triple zero either on the customer's home network or via camping on arrangements.
2. Once a telco identifies a device, they have to let the customer know of the requirement to block within 5 days (5 days to first notification) and that the phone will be blocked within 28-35 days after that. Within that timeframe, they need to send two further separate notifications, in essence reminders to the customers.

3. They also need to provide information about alternative mobile phones that are available, including information about low or no cost mobile phones that can access the emergency call service.
 - a. Note: there is no requirement to provide a new device to the customer, but we understand some telcos are doing so for vulnerable or disadvantaged customer groups.