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ComReg proposes measures to combat auto-dialler Internet Scam

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) today published the measures it proposes for implementation by Internet Service Providers and Telephone Service Providers in order to protect consumers from rogue auto-dialler programs.

The issue of rogue auto-dialler programs and modem hi-jacking has affected a growing number of internet users in Ireland. Problems arise where consumers are not aware that their internet dial-up settings have been changed to an International Number. In many cases, the consumer will only realise they have fallen victim when they receive their phone bill with high call charges to international destinations.

In April this year ComReg issued a Consumer Guide entitled: **Modem Hi-jacking using dialler programs**. The purpose of the guide was to warn consumers about the problem and to highlight some practical measures that could be taken to guard against the problem. Industry currently employs a number of security measures without which the scale of the problem would be considerably worse.

However despite these measures, consumers continue to be affected. Since the beginning of 2004, ComReg has been contacted by over 200 telephone subscribers who have fallen victim with amounts ranging from €20 to €2,000. One business subscriber incurred charges of €12,000. The continued unchecked operation of such programs will not only cause consumer hardship through excessive telephone charges but could impact on internet use by reducing confidence in the security of networks and systems.

ComReg is proposing that Internet Service Providers alert users of their service to the problem of rogue auto-dialler programs and recommend measures users can take to protect themselves from the problem.

In addition, ComReg is proposing that Direct Dialling Facilities to a number of problem destinations be suspended but that specific phone numbers may be unblocked at the request of a telephone subscriber. The full list of destinations is outlined on page 11 of the Consultation Paper.

Ms. Isolde Goggin, Commissioner, said: “ComReg has a statutory duty to protect consumers. I am confident that the measures proposed by ComReg will help to ensure that internet users are protected from having their dial up settings changed without their knowledge or consent.”

Before coming to its final decision ComReg is inviting comments from all interested parties on the measures proposed in the consultation document. The full Consultation paper – ComReg 04/81 is available on the ComReg website at www.comreg.ie and can be located in the Publications’ section of the website.

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