

Copyright 2022. Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission. All Rights Reserved. The present document and its usage are protected under international copyright laws and conventions.

PubliC Certificate issued on April 16, 2024 to English Account NG C3 for personal and temporary display.
news:20220727-TTA-20220727-65113951

Source name

Toronto Star (ON)

Source type

Press • Newspapers

Periodicity

Daily

Geographical coverage

Provincial

Origin

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Wednesday, July 27, 2022

Toronto Star (ON)

• p. B1,B4

• 724 words



Experts ask why outage credit is up to Rogers

Christine DobToronto Star

It shouldn't be up to your telecom provider to decide how to compensate you if you're left in the dark during network outages, academics and consumer advocates say.

Beyond spurring weeks of bad headlines for the company, this month's sprawling Rogers outage has also prompted a wider conversation about the obligations of all telecoms when their services fail.

Technical failures, as in the Rogers case, are not the only threats to network resiliency. Cyber attacks and extreme weather events are ever more common - the violent storm that swept through Ontario and Quebec during the May long weekend, killing at least 10 and knocking out power and communications services for days in some cases, is just one recent example.

When outages hit, experts say an ad hoc response from wireless and internet providers is no longer good enough.

Several witnesses during Monday's House of Commons industry committee hearing on the Rogers outage called for new rules or legislation that would specifically set out consumer rights and

communications standards for telecom providers during outages.

"Consumer compensation requires more than a company simply saying it considered the matter and decided what it thinks is appropriate," Michael Geist, Canada research chair in internet and e-commerce law at the University of Ottawa, told MPs. "There should be regulations that establish clear parameters for compensation, including mandated payments for downtime that are automatically applied to customers' monthly bills."

Geist also called for consistent standards for communications with the public and for telecoms to develop outage maps similar to those used by utilities.

John Lawford, executive director and general counsel of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), has been urging the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission to conduct a formal regulatory inquiry into the outage.

He also wants the regulator to launch a separate process involving all wireless and internet providers "to set a baseline of service resumption, notification,

compensation, interconnection and emergency response."

If the CRTC won't act, Lawford said, "Parliament can legislate. They can legislate the baseline protections that PIAC and retail customers are demanding."

Dwayne Winseck, professor and director of the Global Media and Internet Concentration project at Carleton University, similarly told the hearing that the federal government should use "legislative measures" to "impose more stringent regulatory mandates on the carriers with respect to network quality, information disclosure requirements and measures to be adopted when network outages or disruptions occur."

Following the outage, Rogers decided - seemingly at its sole discretion - to offer customers a five-day credit as compensation after "deliberat(ing) extensively."

In a filing with the CRTC on Friday, Rogers said it "wished to demonstrate our commitment to our customers and recognize how we let them down that day," adding, "as a result, we felt that five days fairly compensated our customers for their frustration with the out-

age."

Many users on social media have commented that the five-day credit is not enough, one legal expert called it "wholly inadequate," and at least one class-action lawsuit has been proposed seeking up to \$400 per subscriber.

During Monday's hearing, some MPs, including the NDP's Brian Masse and Liberal Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, also pressed Rogers executives - as well as Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne and CRTC Chair Ian Scott - on the issue of formal rights for telecom customers

Erskine-Smith compared the Rogers outage to air travel disruptions. Canada's transport regulator has regulations on refunds or rebooking flights for events within an airline's control, and is introducing new rules in September for situations outside of an airline's power.

"Do you think there ought to be a regulatory framework or a legal framework, that it shouldn't be up to you to decide what to compensate Canadians, but it should be up to the law?" Erskine-Smith asked Rogers CEO Tony Staffieri.

Staffieri did not directly answer Erskine-Smith's question or a similar one from Masse, but said the company was focused on earning back customer trust and ensuring that the situation would not happen again.

Masse also asked Champagne and Scott separately if they would take steps that could lead to formal rules around network outages, something he said could be akin to a telecom bill of rights.

Both said their actions to date in response to the Rogers outage are just first

or initial steps and implied further action could be coming.