

WAIVING OF SERVICE-CONNECTION FEE.

As a general rule, persons requiring telephone service are required to pay a fee of £1, known as a service-connection fee, before the work of providing telephone service is undertaken. During the period of economic depression many subscribers found it necessary to relinquish service, and as a result the Department had an appreciable amount of capital lying idle in unused lines and house-wiring. As a special inducement to former subscribers to resume telephone service and also as a measure of good will towards old customers, it was decided to waive the service-connection fee for a period of one year in those cases in which former subscribers required reconnection, provided the wiring from the previous telephone connection was still in position.

REDUCTION IN CHARGE FOR AMPLIFYING TELEPHONES FOR USE BY PERSONS OF IMPERFECT HEARING.

Special amplifying telephones are supplied for use by persons of imperfect hearing. A rental charge of £3 per annum is made for the apparatus, this charge hitherto including the cost of maintaining the special telephone and associated equipment with the exception of the B battery and valve, the cost of the replacement of both or either of which was required to be borne by the subscriber. As the cost of these latter items has fallen considerably during the past few years, it has been decided that the annual rental charge of £3 will, in future, cover the maintenance and replacement of all parts.

PUBLIC CALL OFFICES.

During the year the number of public call offices (coin-in-the-slot telephones) in use increased by seventy-four, the number in operation on the 31st March being 870. The total revenue derived from the installations during the year was £45,423, an increase of 9 per cent. over that for the previous year. The mean average return per machine for the year was £54 10s. 7d.

The charges for calls from certain public call offices in the suburban districts of Auckland and Christchurch were reviewed during the year, and, as a result, the charges from four installations at Auckland and eleven at Christchurch were reduced to 1d. a call.

With a view to improving the appearance and utility of the kiosks or cabinets erected on streets to house public-call-office telephones, the collaboration of the Government Architect was sought. A design which is considered to possess the advantages of low capital cost, improved appearance, greater convenience to the user, and smaller maintenance-costs has been selected and, in order to test it out in practice, a small number of kiosks to the new design will be built. If the design proves suitable after actual trial it will be adopted universally throughout the Dominion.

A timing-device which, on the expiry of a period of approximately three minutes, gives a warning signal, and, without disconnecting the call, precludes further conversation until an additional coin has been inserted has been, or is being, installed in public call offices in automatic-telephones-exchange areas. Previous to the introduction of this device no means existed of restricting the period of a conversation originated from a public call office in an automatic-telephone-exchange area. Its adoption will do much to remove the cause of the numerous complaints received from persons who, through the thoughtlessness of those who use public telephones for unreasonably long conversations, are occasioned delay in completing calls.

MALICIOUS, HARASSING, OR FICTITIOUS TELEPHONE CALLS: PENALTY.

With the growth of automatic telephone service the number of telephone calls of a malicious, harassing, or fictitious nature has increased appreciably in recent years. Such calls are a source of great annoyance to subscribers; and in some cases the recipients of fictitious calls have been put to much inconvenience and unnecessary expense. Although it was often possible to trace the originators of the calls, there was not sufficient statutory provision for dealing effectively with the offenders. In these circumstances it was found desirable to promulgate a regulation providing that every person who originates a telephone message of an objectionable, obscene, or fictitious nature, or of a character calculated to provoke a breach of the peace, or who uses the telephone mischievously or for the purpose of irritating any person or for conveying fictitious orders or instructions of any kind, shall be liable to a fine not exceeding £5.

AUTOMATIC TELEPHONE EXCHANGES.

The seventeen automatic telephone exchanges, comprising four multi-office areas and thirteen single offices, which serve approximately sixty-six thousand subscribers, or slightly more than half of the total number of subscribers in the Dominion, continue to prove equal to all the demands made upon them. As a large number of the 5,000-odd subscribers connected during the year were former subscribers, it has not been necessary to make large additions to the automatic switching-equipment, but at Auckland Central, Wellington Central, and Dunedin Central exchanges additional two-party-line equipment has been installed, while two-party-line service has been made available at the Onehunga, Takapuna, and Oamaru exchanges.

In order to make the best use of the available switching-equipment and to avoid congestion consequent upon the overloading of groups, a uniform system of distributing the traffic load in automatic exchanges is in force, the object of the system being to distribute busy and slack subscribers evenly throughout all groups in an automatic exchange.

To assist in allotting new subscribers to appropriate groups, action is taken to ascertain as far as possible the average daily number of calls likely to be made by each new applicant for telephone service. By securing the co-operation of new subscribers in this manner, and by arranging a subsequent review of the calls actually made, it is possible to ensure a high standard of service with a minimum delay for all subscribers.