# [***Holiday-town phone blast 'could have been lethal'***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:47KG-J0C0-01K9-41GP-00000-00&context=1516831)

The New Zealand Herald

January 3, 2003 Friday

Copyright 2003 The New Zealand Herald. All Rights Reserved.

**Section:** NEWS; General

**Length:** 563 words

**Byline:** By ELIZABETH BINNING and MATHEW DEARNALEY

**Body**

Two teenagers were lucky to escape serious injury when a Whangamata phone booth exploded, sending shards of glass flying across the road.

The young women, 16 and 17, were walking past the Telecom payphone opposite the Ocean Rd dairy early yesterday when they noticed something burning inside the booth.

Moments later, as they went to cross the road, the burning device exploded, sending glass flying 50m, shattering windows in a nearby car and substantially damaging the stainless-steel booth.

Sergeant Vince Ranger of Whangamata police said the explosion was so powerful it blew the booth's door off its hinges and the ceiling into the air.

The young women saw a young male running from near the phone booth shortly after the explosion.

Police said he might know what kind of device was planted in the booth and they want to speak to him.

Lloyd Parker, who lives about 40m from the busy phone booth, was inside his home when he felt the explosion about 12.20am.

"It shook the house, so I went outside. I saw smoke going up and glass was blown everywhere."

Mr Parker said the force of the blast also shattered windows in a car parked outside the phone booth, which has been well used by tourists in the past few days.

Many holidaymakers, unable to use their mobiles when the Vodafone network crashed for two days, have queued to use the payphone.

A restaurant directly across the road from the booth had just closed for the night, but Ocean Rd was still busy and there was a reasonable amount of foot traffic when the explosion occurred.

"It's lucky it wasn't New Year's Eve," said Mr Parker. "If somebody had been walking past, it would have killed them."

Waihi Detective Sergeant Glenn Tinsley said "good luck rather than good management" allowed pedestrians and passing motorists to escape without serious injury.

"I don't believe that this will be the first time this person has tried something like this. It is quite possible that he would have experimented prior to this incident."

Mr Tinsley said it was important to catch the culprit before someone got seriously hurt.

All information would be treated with absolute confidentiality.

Telecom repairmen were expected to start repairing the damaged booth this morning and hoped to have the phone working again this afternoon.

Anyone with information about the explosion should contact the Whangamata police on (07) 865-9111 or Waihi CIB on 027-297-5266.

Meanwhile, holidaymakers with ***cellphones*** rang through belated New Year greetings from Coromandel and Bay of Plenty resorts yesterday after Vodafone finally fixed its technical problem.

The company had battled since midday on New Year's Eve to find what was disrupting its network, as parents fretted over the welfare of teenage revellers whose mobile phones had gone dead.

Some coverage was restored on Wednesday night, once teams of technicians worked out how to fix overloaded network management software, and the company said all areas were back to normal by 9am yesterday.

Vodafone is now promising to accelerate a coverage improvement programme in both affected regions, including the addition of about 30 ***cellphone*** relay sites there over the next year.

Spokeswoman Sarah Williams said nobody would have been billed for unsuccessful calls or text messages.

But she said compensation for the inconvenience was not possible, because of difficulties identifying customers in the affected areas.

**Load-Date:** January 2, 2003

**End of Document**