

Background

Consumers who make calls away from home should be aware that the long distance and local rates charged from payphones and phones in other public areas like hotels, motels, hospitals and airports can vary. Operator Service Providers (OSPs) provide long distance service (and in some cases, local telephone service) from public and pay telephones. When you place a call from a public or pay phone, the OSP serving the telephone usually handles the call if you dial "0" before dialing the telephone number.

Three Simple Rules

- **Stop** before making the call.
- **Look** at the printed information on or near the telephone. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules require each public telephone provider to post on or near each telephone – in plain view of consumers – the name, address and toll-free number of the OSP.
- **Listen** after you dial the number you are calling to determine which OSP is handling your call. The OSP must verbally identify itself to you at the beginning of the call before the call is connected and billed. You will then be told how to learn the total price of a telephone call – including any surcharges – by simply pressing no more than 2 digits, such as the pound key (#), or by staying on the line. This gives you the opportunity to hang up on high rates and to "dial around" the OSP by following your preferred long distance company's instructions for placing calls from public telephones (e.g., dial 1-800-XXX-XXXX to reach your chosen long distance company; punch in your access code, etc.)

Be Phone Wise: Know the Rules

- You have the right to place calls from a public telephone through the long distance company of your choice by dialing an access code ("dialing around" the OSP). "Dialing around" may mean dialing an 800 number, a local number that begins with 950, or a seven digit access number known as a 101-XXXX or 10 10 XXX number. Federal law prohibits blocking 800, 950, or 101-XXXX/10 10 XXX access numbers to long distance companies from public telephones.
- OSPs must connect an emergency call to the appropriate emergency service **immediately** at no charge.
- OSPs cannot knowingly bill for unanswered calls.
- Unless you use coins to pay for a call, the OSP will require you to charge the call to a calling card or credit card, call collect, or bill the call to a third party.

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Be Phone Wise: Know the Rules (cont'd.)

- No matter what type of calling card you use, the only way to be sure that your call will be carried by your preferred long distance company is to follow your long distance company's dialing instructions for placing calls from public telephones. Using your preferred long distance company's calling card will not, by itself, guarantee that your long distance company will carry the call.

What About Calls from Correctional Facilities?

Consumers receiving collect calls from inmates in prisons, jails and other correctional institutions can obtain the price of the call by simply pressing no more than 2 digits or by staying on the line. OSPs providing operator services for inmates' phones in correctional facilities are **required** to tell the party receiving a collect call of his or her right to obtain rate quotations before the OSP connects and bills for the collect call. (Note: FCC rules apply only to interstate OSP calls. Most states, however, have similar requirements for intrastate OSP calls.) The party receiving the collect call can then decide whether or not to accept it or limit its length.

Filing a Complaint with the FCC

If you have problems with the rate you are billed for a call from a public telephone or payphone, first try to resolve it with the provider or the company billing you for the call. If you are unable to resolve it directly, you can file a complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint. You can file your complaint using an FCC online complaint form found at www.fcc.gov/complaints.

You can also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Filing a Complaint with the FCC (cont'd.)

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554.

What to Include in Your Complaint

The best way to provide all the information needed for the FCC to process your complaint is to complete fully the online complaint form. When you open the online complaint form, you will be asked a series of questions that will take you to the particular section of the form you need to complete. If you do not use the online complaint form, your complaint, at a minimum, should indicate:

- your name, address, email address and phone number where you can be reached;
- telephone and account numbers that are the subject of your complaint;
- names and phone numbers of any companies involved with your complaint;
- amount of any disputed charges, whether you paid them, whether you received a refund or adjustment to your bill, the amount of any adjustment or refund you have received, an explanation if the disputed charges are related to services in addition to residential or business telephone services; and
- details of your complaint and any additional relevant information.

For More Information

For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau website at www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center using the information provided for filing a complaint.

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/.

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