

You should know...



North Dakota Public Service Commission

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North Dakota Public
Service Commission

Commissioners:
Randy Christmann
Jill Kringstad
Sheri Haugen-Hoffart

600 E Boulevard Ave.
Department 408
Bismarck, ND
58505-0480

Telephone:
701-328-2400

Fax:
701-328-2410

TDD/TTY:
800-366-6888

E-mail:
ndpsc@nd.gov

Website:
www.psc.nd.gov

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Tips for Telephone Service

CALLING WHEN AWAY FROM HOME

Many people have encountered problems when trying to make calls from hotels, stores, airports, hospitals, and similar locations of temporary accommodation. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Washington, D.C. and the North Dakota State Legislature require telephone service providers at these locations to give callers access to the long distance companies they choose. All pay phones and the majority of phones in hotels and motels were to have been "unblocked" by March of 1993.

REACHING YOUR PREFERRED LONG DISTANCE CARRIER

To use your preferred long distance provider when you are away from home, simply dial its access codes and then dial as you would without the access code. Each long distance company should provide you with its access code upon request. (You may also dial these access codes from your home if you wish to try using a different long distance carrier.)

If you encounter blocking, use special 1-800 numbers to bypass blocking and access the carrier of your choice. (1-800 numbers are on the back of many calling cards and should be available from your provider.)

VERIFYING THE LONG DISTANCE COMPANY

You can verify the long distance company assigned to any telephone by dialing **1-700-555-4141** toll-free from that phone.

CUTTING YOUR LONG DISTANCE BILLS

We often see advertising urging us to change our long distance company. Some ads claim we will save 40 percent or more on long distance calls. But there are no comparisons in these ads to show how much we really will save by changing companies or calling plans.

COMPARING COSTS

Know your calling patterns. Look for plans and promotions that fit your calling patterns. Send copies of your bills to a few long distance companies. Ask what they would charge for the calls. You may find significant savings if you take time to study your options. You may even save money just by choosing a discount plan with your present long distance carrier.

OTHER WAYS TO SAVE MONEY

- Place your calls during discounted hours.
- Use a low-cost, prepaid phone card.
- Place fewer calling card calls.



LONG DISTANCE RESELLERS

Many long distance service resellers operate in North Dakota, buying long distance in bulk and reselling the minutes to their customers. The Public Service Commission registers resellers; however, they are not regulated. You'll find a list of registered resellers on the Public Service Commission (PSC) website at <https://psc.nd.gov/public/consinfo/jurisdictiontelephone.php> and some of them are listed in the yellow pages.

Tips for Telephone Service (cont.)

NEW HOME INSTALLATION

Trying to acquire new utility services in an area where services are not presently available can be frustrating and costly. You may have to pay thousands of dollars and wait several weeks to have service installed.



PLAN FOR UTILITIES

If you are planning to move or build, you should contact utilities well in advance. Careful planning will allow you time to deal with the costs and to plan around utility schedules so that utility services will be available when you are ready to move. It will also give you time to learn about possible alternatives that could save you time or money.

Remember! Contact utilities early. If you have questions or concerns about a utility, call our Public Utilities Division at 701-328-2400. We will be happy to help you in any way we can.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE (Telephone Assistance Program)

The Lifeline Program is a federal program that provides a monthly benefit on phone or broadband service to eligible households. The Lifeline benefit can lower or eliminate the cost of your monthly phone or internet bill. Only one benefit is available per household; either phone service (home or cell) or internet (home or mobile), but not both.

To participate in this federal program, please contact your phone or internet provider for an application. Not all companies participate in the program and availability may vary depending on where you live. Your eligibility may be reviewed annually.

For a list of companies that participate in North Dakota, please visit www.lifelinesupport.org and click on “Companies Near Me.” Once again, please contact the company directly to get signed up.

More information about the Lifeline Program can be found by visiting www.lifelinesupport.org. If you are having problems, please visit the “Lifeline Program Issues” link on that webpage. If the information on that page does not help with the issue you are having, please e-mail lifelinesupport@usac.org or call (800) 234-9473.



HOW TO QUALIFY

To qualify for Link-Up America or Lifeline, persons must be eligible for certain assistance programs. Check with your local County Social Services Office or visit www.lifelinesupport.org for information about qualification.

EXTENDED AREA SERVICE

Extended Service Area (EAS) allows you to call another exchange without having to pay a toll charge. Your local service rate includes the cost of EAS. Look for a “Local Calling Area” page in the front of your local telephone company directory that lists the exchanges you can call without a toll charge. If you have questions about EAS, please contact your local phone company.

CREDITS AND DEPOSITS

Our Public Utilities Division often advises people about credit and deposits and helps many of them make payment arrangements with various utilities.

Some companies may ask for a deposit from a customer with no credit history or a bad credit history. It usually covers an average of two billing periods or two months of service.

Tips for Telephone Service (cont.)

SLAMMING

We've had complaints about long distance service being switched to other companies without the customer's permission. This practice is called "slamming," and it may be done intentionally or by mistake.

If you are slammed, tell your local exchange company to switch you back to your chosen long distance provider. You also have to contact the company that "slammed" you if any charges are involved. In addition, call your preferred company and request reestablishing service with them on your chosen calling plan.

Call 1-700-555-4141 from any telephone for a recorded message to verify which long distance carrier is assigned to that phone. To find out this information for your home telephone, you must dial from your home telephone.

800/900 NUMBER CALLS

Customers complain about being billed for calls when using "800" numbers that access "900" information service providers. They call an 800 number and are told to press some buttons. If they do as they are told and press the buttons, charges begin to accrue.

800 PAY PER CALL

Some information service providers offer "800 pay per call". Callers get personal identification numbers or PINs, to be used to bill future calls to the service. PINs must be ordered by a person calling from the number to be billed, but the information service provider is unable to verify whether the caller is an authorized person.

BLOCKING

Some companies will offer their customers free blocking service for "900" calls. This blocking service may not include blocking "800" calls.

FCC RULES

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has rules for "900" information service providers to ensure that callers are informed of any charges and to help prevent children from getting access to illicit messages. Problems with "800/900" services persist, resulting in complaints to the FCC.

The FCC is looking for solutions, and "800" blocking may be one method.

QUESTIONS? CALL US.

Call our Public Utilities Division at 701-328-2400 if you have questions about these telephone tips or other matters. We're here to serve you!