

Hang Up on High Public/Payphone Rates

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.
- 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

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Accessible formats

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