

Be Aware of Possible Abuses Involving Your Wireless Cell Phone

Are you paying too much for your cell phone services?



Communities for Telecom Rights

Cell phone service can be complicated. Many wireless companies are very aggressive in trying to sign up customers and may give the wrong impression to people in order to sign them up. However, if you feel you have been treated unfairly, you can do something about it.

Be careful when signing up for cell phone service

Service contracts and termination fees*

Make sure you ask if your contract has a termination fee. It is important to understand all the charges you will need to pay. **Be careful!** Most contracts are for a year or more.



Tip: There are usually termination fees charged if you want to terminate service before the end of the contract period.

Trial period*. Many companies give customers a short “trial period” after they sign a contract. During the trial period, customers can cancel the contract without paying the termination fee.

Tip: Use the trial period to make sure that the company’s service is satisfactory. If it is not, cancel your contract before the end of the trial period.

“Shared Minutes” or “Family Plans” “Shared Minutes” or “Family Plans” are becoming more and more popular for families. However it is important to remember that the minutes are shared among the family members who are part of the plan.

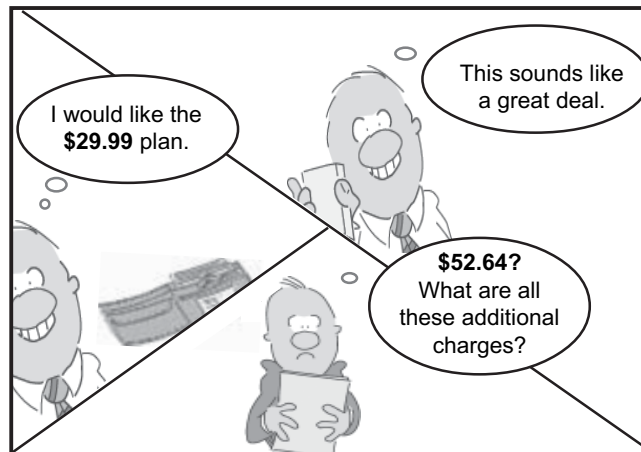
For example: If a plan offers 500 anytime minutes, the 500 minutes are shared by all the people on the plan. It is not 500 minutes for each person.

How do wireless phone companies mislead* you?

A “low monthly fee” . . . with additional charges: Customers may be told about their monthly fee, but may not understand that they will have to pay additional charges for using “peak*” minutes, roaming charges*, and long-distance toll charges*. (See the Fact Sheet about “**How to Choose the Best Cell Phone Service.**”)

“Promotional” or “limited time” offers. Sometimes cell phone companies will offer services for reduced prices.

*refer to the glossary on the next page



However, this reduced price may only be for a limited time, and a higher rate will apply afterwards.

Tip: Always ask: What will your rate be after the promotional offer is over? Will it still be a good deal once the promotional period is over?

Who do you have your contract with? Sometimes, the sales people at the shopping malls or large retail stores selling cell phones and service may not work for the phone companies they represent. This could mean that you could end up with two separate service contracts, one with the reseller* and one with the phone company, each with its own early termination fee. Always ask if the contract is with the carrier or with the reseller and the length of each contract.

Upgrading phones: When you upgrade your phone, ask the sales representative if there is a service charge if you

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Take Action

keep your old phone. The new phone may be free or at low cost but you might still have to pay a service charge for not returning the old phone.

If you upgrade by taking a phone that you have bought from another retailer to your cell phone service provider, you will be charged an activation fee*.

“Free” Phones: Wireless companies may offer you a free phone. Be careful! If you accept the phone you may also be agreeing to accept a one to two year contract.

Automatic Renewal: If you are not careful, your contract for service with a wireless company may be renewed without your knowledge. Sometimes wireless companies will offer you a certain deal that looks like an improvement on your current service. What may not be clear is that by accepting the deal, you are accepting another year or more of service.

Tip: Whenever your wireless phone company invites you to take advantage of a new deal, find out if it will extend your contract.

People can “clone*” and use your wireless phone account without your knowledge

Every cell phone has an Electronic Service Number (ESN)*. If someone finds out the ESN assigned to your cell phone, they will be able to use your wireless phone account. However, with newer digital phones, this may no longer be a problem.

Tip: Guard your cell phone. There are electrical devices that can actually send signals and “clone” your wireless phone, even if it is locked in your car. Also be careful of letting strangers use your phone. They can look up your ESN while using your phone. You may want to consider dialing numbers for a stranger if you let one use your phone.

Tip: Guard your cell phone contract. It may also state your ESN.

What to do if your account has been stolen: If you see that there are phone calls you did not make on your phone bill, contact your cell phone company as soon

as possible. The phone company can change your phone’s ESN so that your wireless account will not continue to be charged.

Glossary

Termination Fees- These are fees you must pay to end telephone service with a company. Usually, you only pay termination fees if you sign a contract for service for a certain length of time (for example, one year) and you end the service before the time is up.

Trial period- During a “trial period” you can try out a certain telephone service without having to commit to the service.

For example: A telephone company may have a contract for one year of service, but you may have a “trial period” of two weeks during which you can cancel the contract without paying any termination fees.

Mislead- Sometimes phone companies will lie or trick you into buying things you do not want or need or paying for services you never received.

Peak- “Peak” hours are the time of day that most people make telephone calls. Generally peak hours are weekdays after 6:00 a.m. and before 9:00 p.m. Sometimes calls are more expensive during peak hours.

Roaming Charges - These are charges you must pay when you make wireless telephone calls while you are outside of your home calling or service area.

Toll Charges-Toll charges are billed to you when you make calls to nearby cities.

Reseller-Sometimes a phone company will use another company to sell its phone service to customers. This other company is called a reseller.

Activation fee-These are charges you must pay to begin telephone service with a company.

Clone- “Clone” means that someone copies your cell phone’s codes so that they can use your cell phone account.

Electronic Service Number (ESN)- This number gives someone access to your cell phone account. You should guard this number.

Terms of service- These terms control how your telephone service works, how much you are charged, and other issues related to your telephone service.

General Tips:

- ◆ **Read the fine print.** Look at the fine print on any written materials related to telephone service. It may contain terms of service* that you do not know about.
- ◆ **Immediately check and save your bills.** As soon as you receive your bill, check it over carefully to see if there are any charges that you do not agree with. Save your bills for several months, in case you need to dispute charges.
- ◆ **It is your right to question charges.** If you think there is a charge on your phone bill for something you did not do, you have a right to question the charge.
- ◆ **Be careful about giving personal information over the phone.**
- ◆ **Ask if the company offers information in your native language.**