

Payphones

F a c t



S h e e t

The 1984 order that broke up the Bell system allowed for deregulation of the payphone industry. This means that payphones do not have regulated rates in Oregon.

The Oregon Public Utility Commission has developed this consumer bulletin to provide answers to frequently asked questions.

Who carries the calls from a payphone?

The company carrying the calls from a payphone can either be the local phone company or a competitive provider, also referred to as an operator service provider.

Operator service providers use the lines from your local phone company and lines from long distance companies to provide service to their customers. The decision of which company will carry the calls in a payphone is made either by the owner of the location where the phone is found, or the owner of the payphone.

If a competitive provider carries the calls from a payphone, they will carry the local as well as long distance calls. Most consumers won't see any difference in local calls, although operator service providers may charge different rates for, or restrict the length of local calls. In addition, if a local call uses operator assistance, e.g., is charged to a credit card or calling card, placed collect, etc., the consumer will also notice a difference.

How will I know?

If you are curious about who is providing service to a payphone, dial "0" and listen to the operator who answers the phone. Providers are required to identify their company when answering the "0" call. If you cannot understand them or if they do not identify the company for which they work, ask them.

What are all those notices in the payphone?

In Oregon, payphones must be labeled with some specific information:

The owner of the payphone and a number to call to report problems

The price of a local call

Any long distance or local calling time duration restrictions

Whether the payphone will accept incoming calls

The long distance carrier for the payphone

Notification that the payphone provides access to all available long distance providers.

Notice to dial 9-1-1 for emergencies



Are competitive providers required to do anything else?

The company providing the operator services must also follow some rules:

The operator service provider must be registered with the PUC.

The operator service provider must identify itself at the beginning of any calls beginning with an "0." Companies in Oregon are required to identify themselves before the phone starts ringing at the called party's location.

Operator service providers must maintain a list of emergency numbers for each territory they serve, and transfer emergency calls to the appropriate number free of charge.

Operator service providers are required upon request to transfer a call free of charge to, or instruct the caller how to reach the local phone company's operator services.

Operator service providers cannot bill or collect for calls that are not completed to the caller's destination. If a call is picked up by an answering machine, it is considered a completed call.

Operator service providers cannot screen calls, and prevent or block the completion of calls that would allow the caller to reach a different carrier.



REMEMBER: JUST BECAUSE YOU USE A CALLING CARD TO PLACE A CALL FROM A PAYPHONE DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE COMPANY ISSUING YOUR CALLING CARD WILL CARRY THE CALL.

What if I want to use another long distance carrier?

All long distance companies have ways to access their service. This may be done through an 800 number, an access code, or a 950 number.

You should ask your preferred long distance carrier how to access their service when you are away from home. The consumer has the responsibility to ensure they are using the company they want when making a call. Be sure to listen to identifying information from the operator at the start of your call, and again before the call starts ringing.

Long distance carriers use a calling card to identify you for billing purposes; it does not mean that the issuing company will carry the call or that you will receive favorable rates.

What if I have problems?

If you find a payphone that is not properly labeled or does not comply with the rules listed above, contact the Consumer Services Section at the Public Utility Commission. Be sure to have the location and phone number of the payphone where the problem occurred.

If a company repeatedly fails to comply with Oregon rules, steps can be taken to revoke the operator service provider's certificate to operate in Oregon, or the payphone lines may be disconnected.

Public Utility Commission Consumer Services Section

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TTY users please call through the Oregon

Relay at 1-800-735-2900 or dial 711.

Agency Web site: www.puc.state.or.us