



Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

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PSC Adds Two New Area Codes to Supplement the 715 and 920 Area Codes

*An overlay of the new codes will ensure timely, efficient resolution
of area code exhaust problem*

MADISON – With Wisconsin’s 715 and 920 area codes projected to run out of available phone numbers near the end of 2011, today the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) ordered relief for both areas by means of an overlay. Area code 715 will have an overlay of new area code 534, while area code 920 will have an overlay of new area code 274.

With an overlay, a new area code is introduced within the same geographic region as the existing area code. All existing customers will keep their current area code and telephone numbers. Eventually new telecommunications providers and new customers to the area may be assigned telephone numbers with the new area code. With an overlay, because both area codes reside within the same geographic area, all local calls must be dialed using the area code and the 7-digit telephone number (10-digit dialing). This 10-digit dialing requirement is mandated by the Federal Communications Commission. The option to an overlay, not selected by the PSC, was a geographic split. With a split, each area would have been divided and about half the customers in 715 and 920 would have needed to change their existing area code.

“Nobody likes seeing area code changes, but we have done all we can to forestall today’s decision,” said Chairperson Eric Callisto. “Overlays are the cheapest, most efficient way to implement area code relief, and our decision today will make future area code relief easier. PSC staff and the telecommunications industry will work hard to ensure the smooth addition of these codes to the available pool.”

“In other states across the nation, overlays are fast becoming the norm for area code relief practices,” said Commissioner Mark Meyer. “Wisconsin customers will benefit from this trend because it is the cheapest, most feasible and economically sound option.”

“Working with the telecommunications industry, PSC staff and interested parties to resolve this issue, we have been able to allow ample time for the transition of customers in the 920 and 715 area codes,” said Commissioner Lauren Azar.

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It is currently anticipated that the new 534 area code will be introduced in the 715 area in the summer of 2010. The new 274 code in the 920 area may be implemented in late 2011. The introduction of the new area codes has no impact on rates for local or long distance calling. Some customers may need to adjust automatic dialers, alarm systems, internal phone systems or call forwarding arrangements to accommodate the 10-digit dialing requirement.

In recent years, the prevalence of technology in everyday life has increased tremendously, causing an elevated demand for telecommunications services. The elevated demand encompasses new providers such as wireless cell phone companies and competing telephone companies as well as computer technology, OnStar, and security alarm systems services.

Area code changes are not unique to Wisconsin. Many dozens of new area codes have been introduced throughout the nation over past several years. Area code 608 is projected to run out of available numbers in 2016, with the 262 area code expected to exhaust in 2022 and area code 414 in the year 2032.

The PSC has been addressing area code exhaust in the 715 and 920 area codes for over a year. The PSC held public hearings throughout the state and took comments from hundreds of consumers. The PSC has pursued number conservation efforts to extend the area code lives as much as possible. Most recently it instituted a procedure called mandatory number pooling to make thousands of unused numbers held by them available for others to use.

Documents associated with 715 and 920 area code relief can be viewed on the PSC's Electronic Regulatory Filing System at <http://psc.wi.gov/>. Type case numbers for (715), 5-TN-100, and for (920), 5-TN-106 in the boxes provided on the PSC homepage, or click on the Electronic Regulatory Filing System button.

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