

Phone Blocking Options

How to prevent others from running up your telephone bill.



Disconnections Allowed

There are many ways to control landline and wireless phone usage without allowing children or guests unlimited access to your credit with the telephone company. Several blocking options are available for different types of services. While most of the blocks are very good, none of them offer 100% guarantees. We'll talk about the options and pitfalls of the different types of blocks.

Blocking Options Available From Your Local Telephone Company

Toll Restriction

This feature blocks access to the long distance network. In other words, calls dialed with a "1" plus the area code will not go through. This service is free for low-income customers and free on the first activation for other customers. Pitfalls: dialing 1-800 will still go through. While these calls are typically free, it may be possible to dial a 1-800 number to a calling card access number and then to make long distance calls on a calling card associated with your number. Also some of the marketing for 900 services suggests that callers dial an 800 number and then press further digits to accept charges, and these calls sometimes appear on bills as 900 calls. If this happens, dispute the bill.

Collect Call and Third Party Billed Call Blocks

These features block someone from placing a collect call billed to your home phone or to block calls placed elsewhere from being billed to your home phone. If such unwanted or unauthorized calls are running up your bill, consider adding the appropriate block. Pitfalls: unfortunately, not all long distance providers honor the blocks. If you have collect or third-party-billed calls blocked, and unauthorized calls appear on your bill anyway, dispute the billing with the provider and with your local telephone company.

900/976 Blocking

This feature blocks outgoing calls beginning with the 900 or 976 prefix, which are numbers for which you have to pay a per-call or per-minute fee. This blocking service is free for low-income customers and free on the first activation for other customers. **Pitfalls:** none with the blocks. However, some of the marketing for 900 services suggests that callers dial an 800 number and then

press further digits to accept charges, and these calls sometimes appear on bills as 900 calls. If this happens dispute the bill.

Extended Community Call (ECC) Blocking

ECC calls are local calls charged on a per minute basis. This feature blocks the ability to place calls to ECC prefixes, which are typically to communities within 15 miles. These ECC calls are dialed with seven digits, without first dialing 1, and are billed at from 1 to 8 cents *per minute*. This ECC blocking service is free for low-income customers and free on the first activation for other customers.

Pay-Per-Use Feature Blocks

Blocks may be available that prevent access to enhanced features available on a pay-per-use basis, such as three-way calling or automatic call back. Contact your local telephone company for more information.

Passwords

Your local telephone company may offer an extra security arrangement for your service so that changes to your telephone account, e.g. adding or removing features, may only be made if the caller knows a password. Contact your local telephone company for more information.

PIC Freeze Protection

A freeze on your Primary Interexchange Carrier (PIC) designation means that long distance companies cannot change your long distance provider without your express consent. This practice is known as slamming and the PIC freeze is designed to prevent it. **Pitfalls:** It will not prevent slamming by certain companies that resell service on other companies' long distance networks.

Cramming Protection

Cramming is the practice of adding unauthorized services or features or misleading or deceptive charges to a customer's local telephone bill. Some local telephone companies offer a cramming block to prevent adding such items to your phone service and bill. Contact your local telephone company for more information.

Blocking Services Available From Long Distance Providers

Services will vary by provider, and are only effective for calls handled by that provider. Contact the individual companies for further information on the following options.

International Block

Many long distance providers offer the blocking of outgoing international calls which are dialed with the 011 prefix.

Blocks to All Services

You may be able to ask a long distance company to block access to its network for calls originating from your line. This block addresses concerns about the potential for others with access to your home phone to establish service, make unauthorized long distance calls or obtain a calling card in your name.

Blocking Services Available From Wireless Providers

Although they are not required to do so, many wireless providers will offer blocks that can help you control your bill. Some of the options available are:

Internet Block

This block prevents access to the Internet from your wireless phone to avoid the associated usage charges.

Limits on Minutes or Text Messages

Some wireless companies let you limit the number of minutes or text messages per month on certain phones. This can be useful if you are responsible to pay for another family member's cell phone usage. Some companies charge fees for these services.

Who can help?

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) is the state agency that oversees the telephone industry. Most local and in-state telephone billing and service complaints may be directed to the PSC. Call or write to:

P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854
(800) 225-7729 (800-CAL-PSCW)
TTY (608) 267-1479
Fax (608) 266-3957
E-Mail: pscsecs@psc.state.wi.us
<http://psc.wi.gov>

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection mediates and investigates telecommunications complaints, including those regarding mail and phone solicitations, deceptive and misleading marketing, and long distance rate changes. Call or write to:

P.O. Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708-8911
(800) 422-7128
TTY (608)224-5058
Fax (608) 224-4939
E-Mail: datcph hotline@datcp.state.wi.us
<http://datcp.state.wi.us>

The Wisconsin Department of Justice enforces state law, including telecommunications. Write to:
123 West Washington Ave.
P.O. Box 7857
Madison, WI 53707-7857
www.doj.state.wi.us

The Federal Communications Commission is the federal agency that oversees the telecommunications industry. Call or write to:

Consumer Protection Branch
Common Carrier Bureau
445 12th St., SW
Washington, DC 20554
Toll-free (888) 225-5322 (888-CALL FCC)
Toll-free TTY (888) 835-5322 (888-TELL FCC)
www.fcc.gov

Bilingual Service / Servicio Bilingüe

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is able to provide customer assistance in Spanish. When calling the PSC, please ask to speak to a Spanish speaking representative. We can help you.

En la Comisión de Servicio Público del estado de Wisconsin (PSC) podemos ayudarle en Español . Al llamar el PSC, pida por favor hablar a un representante de habla hispana.

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the provision of programs, services, or employment. If you are speech, hearing, or visually impaired and need assistance, call (608)-8524 or TTY (608) 267-1479. We will try to find another way to get the information to you in usable form.

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is an independent state agency that oversees more than 1,100 Wisconsin public utilities that provide natural gas, electricity, heat, steam, water and telecommunication services.



Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

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