

Cellular Connection Protection

consumer**brief**

With deregulation of the phone industry came an assortment of options for New Jersey's citizens. However, confusion often accompanies choice and when choosing a cellular phone service, you must be a savvy consumer.

Cell phone service is unregulated, but it is popular with consumers. Many consumers use their cell phones as their home phones. While competition has started to bring down the cost of air time, calls can add up fast if you are not careful. There are a number of cellular phone companies, price plans and coverage options from which to choose. Before you settle on a plan and a company, you should shop around.

DO-NOT-CALL REGISTRY

You may add your cell phone number to the National Do-Not-Call Registry either online at www.DoNotCall.gov, or by calling the toll-free number 1-888-382-1222 from the telephone you wish to register.

If you receive an unwanted telemarketing call three months after you registered your phone number, you may file a complaint by:

E-mail: fccinfo@fcc.gov

Internet: www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html

Voice telephone: 1-888-225-5322

or you can mail your written complaint to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquires and Complaint Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Your letter should include:

- your name, address and daytime phone number;
- the telephone number(s) involved with the complaint;
- the type of resolution you are seeking; and
- as much specific information about the complaint as possible, including the identity of the telemarketer or the company contacting you.

CONSUMER TIPS

- Find a plan that best fits your calling pattern and needs. It is important to estimate how many minutes per month you intend to use your wireless phone.
- Examine your plan's "home calling area." Cellular plans often differ from local service plans for regular land phones.



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- Know the monthly access fee and the charge for air time during peak calling hours.
- Ask about charges for dialing “800” numbers and directory assistance. Generally, they are charged as calls made outside your “home calling area” and this may result in additional expenses.
- Check on “per-call” surcharges and whether you will be charged if you reach a busy signal or if your party does not answer.
- Ask about incremental charges per minute and the cost of incoming calls.
- Inquire about all fees associated with a service plan. Some plans contain charges for “air time, roaming, and universal funds.” And remember, there are also taxes associated with wireless service.
- Check the contract for an automatic renewal provision.
- Ask if there are any cancellation fees if you terminate the contract early. Some long-term contracts may offer lower rates, but will lock you into a plan that may be inappropriate for you in the future by charging high fees to cancel.
- Inquire about “dead zones.” All of the services have gaps in their coverage areas. This means you may lose your call while talking or service may be unavailable between service towers.
- Read the contract carefully and understand all of the terms before signing it.
- Get everything in writing.

Shop around before you make your final decision. The contract you are signing is a binding contract and once you have signed, the phone service is yours for the duration of the contract.

And remember, as of July 1, 2004, drivers in New Jersey are not permitted to talk on hand-held cell phones while driving, without the use of a hands-free device.

New Jersey Office of the Attorney General
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