

Prepaid Phone Cards

consumer *brief*

A prepaid phone card is a card that you purchase (for a set price) and use to make long-distance phone calls. Prepaid phone cards are popular with travelers, students, people who frequently call overseas and those who have not selected a long-distance service.

Prepaid phone cards are usually sold in dollar amounts or by the number of minutes on the card. You can purchase them at newsstands, post offices, retail stores, and grocery or convenience stores. Generally they cost from \$5.00 to \$15.00. The rates for some cards are based on calls within the continental United States or to a particular country. Many cards have an expiration date, usually printed on the back. If you do not use all of the time on the card before that date, you will lose the remaining minutes.

Unfortunately, sometimes a card does not work or hold the value shown. Just as unfortunate, sometimes the service provided by the sponsor of the phone card is unsatisfactory. The store where you purchased the card has no control over the quality of the service you receive. To make sure you are getting that for which you have paid, you should be using a card costing no more than a few dollars so that you can test the service.

Consider the following before buying a prepaid phone card:

1. Ask the store manager if he or she will give you your money back if the phone service is unsatisfactory.
2. Look for the rate for local and long-distance calls on the card's package or the machine from which you intend to buy the card. You can also get information about rates, fees, charges and minutes available and remaining on the card at the toll-free customer service number listed on the card.
3. If the rates are very low, beware - particularly if you plan to make international calls. Very low rates may indicate poor customer service.

4. Check for an expiration date. Most cards expire one year after the first time that you use it.
5. Be sure you understand the instructions that come with the card.
6. Make sure the card comes in a sealed envelope or has a sticker covering the Personal Identification or "PIN" number - otherwise anyone can use the time for which you have already paid.

WHAT DOES THE LAW COVER?

A New Jersey Law that became effective on August 1, 2008 requires disclosure of all fees and charges and that a card deliver the number of minutes promised. If the sponsor of the card does not address your complaints, call the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs at 800-242-5846 (*toll free within New Jersey.*)



800-242-5846 › New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs
www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov

