



Consumer Issues

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Keep your Phone Number



Consumers with wireline, or land line, phones have been able to switch from one local carrier to another in the same geographical area without having to change their phone number. Now, this service is available to wireless phone customers as well.

New Federal Communications Commission (FCC) orders allow wireless “local number portability” (LNP). This means you can switch telephone carriers within the same geographic area and keep your existing telephone number. This new regulation went into effect on November 24, 2003 for major metropolitan areas. Wireless carriers outside of major metropolitan areas must be capable of porting numbers within 6 months after receiving a request or by May 24, 2004, whichever is later.

To help consumers understand the process, the FCC has provided information about initiating the process, fees and charges, the adjustment period, and how emergency services (E-911) will be affected by the new orders.

Initiating the Process

If you want to change phone carriers:

- ◆ Do not terminate your service with your existing carrier before initiating service with the prospective new carrier.
- ◆ Contact the prospective new carrier. The new carrier will start the process of porting by contacting your current carrier.
- ◆ You may request service from a new carrier at any time.
- ◆ You are still responsible for any early termination fees that may exist in your contract and any outstanding balance owed to your existing carrier. Even if you owe fees and decide to change service providers, the old carrier may not refuse to port your number.

Fees and Charges

- ◆ The convenience of porting numbers does have a cost:
- ◆ Carriers may charge a fee to recover their “porting” costs. These fees may vary, but cannot exceed the actual cost of porting.
- ◆ Carriers may not refuse to port a number because a consumer has not paid a porting fee, regardless of how much is charged for LNP.
- ◆ Ask if your new carrier has a policy of reimbursing LNP charges from old carriers.

The Adjustment Period

Here is a general idea of how long the process will take:

- ◆ For a wireless-to-wireless transfer, your phone number should work within a few hours of your request to change wireless providers.
- ◆ A wireline-to-wireless transfer may take several business days to complete. Find out if you will be able to use your current wireline number during the transfer.
- ◆ If you port from a wireline phone to a wireless phone, your wireline long distance carrier will not move with you. New long distance service will be provided by the new wireless carrier. Be sure to verify this change before changing service providers.
- ◆ For wireline to wireless porting, there may be a period of “mixed service.” This means you will have two telephones with the same number during the transition period. (continued on page 2)

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Keep your Phone Number (continued)

Emergency Services

- ◆ In some areas of the country, 911 operators automatically receive the phone number or location of a wireless call, but this is not the case in many areas. Technology to provide this information (E911) is being implemented to support wireless phones nationwide.
- ◆ Because of this, during the time of “mixed service” your E911 service may be affected. For example, if you dial 911, the call would go through, but an operator would not be able to return your call if you were to be disconnected. Before porting either a wireless or wireline number, ask the new carrier how long the porting process will take and how the porting process will affect a call to 911 services.

Other Important Issues

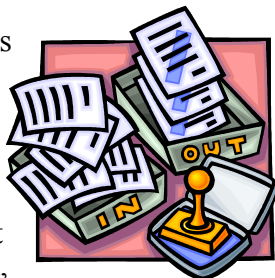
- ◆ A service provider switch may mean purchasing a new phone, even if you retain the same phone number. Wireless handsets among different service providers may not be compatible.
- ◆ In a few areas, as you roam, you may not be able to send and receive calls and other services, such as caller ID may function improperly.

Reference: Wireless Local Number Portability. 10 November 2003.
FCC Consumer Facts.

<http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/wirelessportability.html>

Organize for the New Year

Each year brings New Year’s resolutions. This year, instead of setting an unrealistic goal, set one that will help you save time: organizing your family’s important papers. Although it may sound like a daunting task, taking time to sort this information can prevent future headaches and hassles. Every household must develop a system that works best for them; however, following these general guidelines will help you create a user-friendly filing system.



1. Separate important papers and secure them in a safe deposit box.

Use a safe deposit box in a bank or a fire-proof safe for the originals of all important, difficult to replace documents (also keep a copy at home). Some items you may wish to include are:

- ◆ Birth certificates
- ◆ Citizenship papers

- ◆ Marriage certificates
- ◆ Adoption papers
- ◆ Divorce decrees
- ◆ *Wills
- ◆ *Advance directives
- ◆ *Powers of attorney
- ◆ Death certificates
- ◆ Deeds
- ◆ Titles to cars
- ◆ Household Inventory
- ◆ Veteran’s papers
- ◆ Bonds and stock certificates
- ◆ Important contracts
- ◆ Passports

**Keep these items easily accessible in the event you do not have access to the safe deposit box.*

2. Create a filing system for active records you use at home.

Frequently used records need to be easily accessible. General categories of these records include:

- ◆ Tax receipts (such as charitable deductions)
- ◆ Unpaid bills
- ◆ Paid bill receipts
- ◆ Current bank statements
- ◆ Current cancelled checks
- ◆ Income tax working papers
- ◆ Employment records
- ◆ Health benefit information
- ◆ Credit card information
- ◆ Record of passwords
- ◆ Insurance policies
- ◆ Family health records (immunizations)
- ◆ Appliance manuals and warranties
- ◆ Receipts for items under warranty
- ◆ Education information (diploma, transcripts, test scores)
- ◆ Inventory of safe deposit box and key
- ◆ Loan statements
- ◆ Loan payment books
- ◆ Receipts for expensive items not yet paid for

3. Create a dead storage file.

Include all active file papers that are over three years old. However, if you frequently use a document more than three years old, keep it in the active file for easy accessibility (continued on page 3).

Organize for the New Year (continued)

4. Discard items you do not need to keep.

Items that you can discard after they've served their purpose include:

- ◆ Salary statements (after checking on W-2 form)
- ◆ Cancelled checks for cash or nondeductible expenses
- ◆ Expired warranties
- ◆ Expired coupons
- ◆ Other records that have been replaced by newer versions (such as appliance manuals)

How Long Should I Keep It?	
Document	How Long to Keep It
Bank statements	6 years
Birth certificates	Forever
Canceled checks	6 years
Contracts	Until updated
Credit card account numbers	Until updated
Divorce papers	Forever
Home purchase and improvement records	As long as you own the property or are rolling over profits from it into new property
Household inventory	Until updated
Insurance, life	Forever
Insurance, car, home, etc.	Until updated
Investment records	6 years after tax deadline for year of sale
Investment certificates	Until cashed or sold
Loan agreements	Until updated
Military service records	Forever
Real estate deeds	As long as you own the property
Receipts for large purchases and service contracts/warranties	Until sold or discarded
Social Security card	Forever
Tax returns	6 years from filing date
Vehicle titles	Until sold or disposed of
Will	Until updated
Reference: <u>Managing Household Records</u> , Federal Citizen Information Center. http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cfocus/cfhouseholdrecords03/focus.htm	

Social Security and Medicare 2004 Benefits and Changes	
2004 cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)	2.1%
Tax rate for employees	7.65%
Social Security portion	6.20%
Medicare portion	1.45%
Tax rate for self-employed	15.30%
Maximum taxable payroll earnings	
Social Security	\$ 87,900
Medicare	No limit
Retirement earnings-test exemption annual amounts	
Under age 65	\$ 11,640
Year individual reaches full retirement age	\$ 31,080
Maximum monthly Social Security (SS) benefit for worker retiring at age 65 and 4 months	\$ 1,825
Estimated monthly Social Security (SS) benefits	
All retired workers	\$ 922
Couple (both receiving benefits)	\$ 1,523
Widow(er)	\$ 888
Standard federal monthly SSI payments	
Individual	\$ 564
Couple	\$ 846
Maximum allowable assets for SSI	
Individual	\$ 2,000
Couple	\$ 3,000
Medicare Part B monthly premium	\$ 66.60
Medicare Part B deductible per year	\$ 100
Medicare Part A deductible, hospital stay:	
First 60 days	\$ 876
Co-payment (per day) for days 61-90	\$ 219
Co-payment (per day) for lifetime reserve days (91-150)	\$ 438
Co-payment (per day) for skilled-nursing facility, days 21-100	\$ 109.50
Buy-in premium (per month) (worked less than 30 quarters)	\$ 343
Buy-in premium (per month) (worked 30-39 quarters)	\$ 189
Reference: Social Security Administration and Department of Health and Human Services	

Shopping for Credit Cards



Often when we use credit cards, we forget the cost associated with this convenience. Be sure the credit card you choose meets your needs. Terms and conditions associated with the card will affect the overall cost you incur when using it. When you read the application or speak with a representative, be sure to get

information about the following items:

Annual Percentage Rate (APR)

The annual percentage rate (APR) measures the cost of credit as a yearly rate. Notice whether it fixed or variable. If the issuer offers you a variable APR, they may adjust the rate, which causes finance charges to fluctuate. They must give information explaining the rate variability, how it is determined and how much and often it may change. The credit card issuer must also provide the “periodic rate,” which is applied to your outstanding balance to compute the billing cycle’s finance charge.

Grace Period

A grace period (or free period) is the amount of time you can avoid finance charges by paying your balance in full before the due date. If no grace period exists, the card issuer may charge you starting the date you use your card or the date each transaction is posted on your account. When terms provide this period, the issuer must mail your bill at least 14 days before payment is due.

Annual Fees

Many credit card issuers charge an annual fee for using their card. Annual fees can range from \$8 to nearly a \$100 per year.

Transaction Fees and Other Charges

If you use the card for a cash advance, make a late payment, or exceed your credit limit, you may see an additional charge on your bill. Some credit card companies also charge a monthly fee whether you use it or not.

Computing of Finance Charges

If you do not have a grace period or anticipate paying for large purchases over a period of time, you need to know how your finance charges will be calculated. The method used to compute those charges can significantly influence how much you pay.

Additional Factors

Be sure to consider if the credit limit is high enough, how widely the card is accepted, and if special services and features accompany it (i.e. affinity cards for organizations or alumni associations). Thinking about these factors will help you ignore tempting introductory offers, evaluate your decision, and find the best card for your situation.

Reference: [Choosing and Using Credit Cards](#). January 1999. FTC Facts for Consumers. <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/credit/choose.pdf>

Written by:

Cathy F. Bowen

Cathy F. Bowen, Ph.D.
State Extension Specialist Consumer Issues
Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
(814) 863-7870 E-mail: cbowen@psu.edu

This file may be accessed electronically at:
<http://agexted.cas.psu.edu/fcs/cimenu.html>

Assistance with the design and writing of this issue has been provided by Heather Jones. Ms. Jones is a graduate student in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education.

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