

Idaho Public Utilities Commission

Case Nos. GNR-T-13-03, Order No. 32787

Case No. GNR-T-13-02, Order No. 32768

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Telephone surcharges decreasing June 1

A surcharge that helps to ensure low-income Idahoans, including many senior citizens, have access to local dial-tone service for medical and other emergencies, will decrease from 7 cents per month to 3 cents for each business, residential and wireless phone line in Idaho effective June 1.

The Idaho Public Utilities Commission agreed to decrease the surcharge for the Idaho Telecommunications Service Assistance Program (ITSAP) due to decreased participation and a reduction in the state portion of the credit qualifying customers get from \$3.50 per month to \$2.50.

Those customers who live on non-tribal lands who qualify for ITSAP receive a combined federal and state monthly discount of \$12.75 from their telephone bills, though that will decrease to \$11.75 on July 1.

Program eligibility is determined by the state Department of Health and Welfare and the Idaho Public Utilities Commission establishes the amount of surcharge necessary to fund the program.

During 2012, an average of 23,434 Idahoans per month received ITSAP assistance, down 7 percent from the average of 25,310 in 2011. The number of wireline access lines continues to decline, with a 4 percent drop during 2012 while wireless (cellular) lines increased by 13 percent. The average number of wireline access lines was 491,572 in Idaho during 2012, compared to 512,672 in 2011. Wireless access lines increased from 1,132,234 in 2011 to 1,276,830 in 2012.

The new 3-cent per line charge is effective June 1. The surcharge has been as high as 12 cents per line per month in past years.

In a related case, the commission decided to leave at current levels the funding for the Idaho Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS), which assists hearing and speech impaired telecommunications users.

The TRS allows hearing and speech impaired citizens to use telephones via a relay center that converts oral conversation to text-type and vice versa. The service is funded by an

assessment on residential and business lines of 2 cents per month and a charge of two-tenths of 1 cent per minute on intrastate long distance calls.

Use of the service is declining due to advancing technology in Internet-based services and cell phone texting.

During 2012, the relay center handled 48,685 minutes of traffic compared to 70,995 during 2011, a 19 percent decrease. Although the number of captioned telephone service sets increased by 10 percent, usage decreased by 22 percent.

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