# Tips for Using Public Phones and Payphones

The long distance and local rates charged from payphones and other phones in public areas such as hotels, hospitals, and airports can vary, and may be surprisingly high. Before you use a public phone or payphone, know what to expect.

**Be phone wise: know your rights**

The FCC, along with states, protect consumers using public phones and payphones with rules that address:

- **Emergency calls**: Operator service providers must connect a 911 call immediately at no charge.
- **TRS**: Local calls to Telecommunications Relay Services – services that enable calls to or from persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled – are free of charge at payphones.
- **Dialing around**: You can place calls from a payphone or other public phone through the long distance company of your choice by using an access code to "dial around" the payphone or public phone service provider. Dialing around may mean dialing an 800 number, a local number that begins with 950, or a seven digit access number known as a 101-XXXX or 10 10 XXX number. Federal law prohibits blocking these access numbers to long distance companies from public telephones.
- **Did not connect**: Operator service providers cannot knowingly bill for unanswered calls.
- **Local rates:** Numerous states continue to regulate the rates for local collect calls.  Check with your state public utility commission or local phone company for rates.
- **Service provider information**: Public telephone providers must post in plain view on or near each telephone the name, address and toll-free number of the service provider.
- **Toll-free calls:** Calls to toll-free numbers, including calls billed to calling cards or credit cards, do not require a coin. You can reach an operator without depositing a coin.

**When making a call**

Listen after you dial the number you are calling to determine which service provider is handling your call. The service provider must identify itself to you at the beginning of the call before the call is connected and billed. You will then be told how to learn the total price of a telephone call – including any surcharges – by pressing no more than 2 digits, or by staying on the line.

Unless you use coins to pay for a call, the operator service provider will require you to charge the call to a calling card or credit card, call collect or bill the call to a third party.

**Calling cards and your preferred long distance company**

No matter what type of calling card you use, the only way to be sure that your call will be carried by your preferred long distance company is to follow your long distance company's dialing instructions for placing calls from public telephones. Simply using your preferred long distance company's calling card will not guarantee that your long distance company will carry the call. You can contact your preferred long distance provider and ask for instructions on how to place a call using their services from a payphone.

**Filing a complaint**

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

  Federal Communications Commission
  Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
  Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
  45 L Street NE
  Washington, DC 20554

**Consumer Help Center**

For more information on consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

**Alternate formats**

To request this article in an alternate format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number at the bottom of the page, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

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