



Is It Time to Cut the Cord and Just Go Wireless?



Dear D.C. Telecommunications Consumer,

Recent media attention on ever present cell phones has "ordinary" consumers reassessing their cell phone use. As cell phones become increasingly more popular, particularly with young people (*who have literally grown up using a cell phone*), many consumers have asked the Office of the People's Counsel, "*Do I really need a land line, and should I go completely wireless?*"

Good questions. The answers are, maybe. Deciding whether to abandon your landline and rely only on your cell phone should be based on your lifestyle and your financial means. The realities of modern life suggest an increasing need to "stay connected" and to talk to someone IMMEDIATELY!

First came Three-Way Calling - no more busy signals! Next, multiple home phone lines -- one for the parents, another (or maybe two) for fax machine/internet service, and maybe another one for the kids. And now, just about everyone owns a cell phone. Gone are the days of waiting to speak to friends, relatives, and business associates. Cell phones have made it simple to "*reach out and touch.*"

D.C.'s Channel 4¹ recently aired a segment, "Cutting the Cord," examining the growing trend of households switching from landline phone service to exclusive cell phone use². After the segment aired, the Office received numerous calls from consumers asking for help in deciding whether to switch. As a result, OPC has developed a series of questions to help you decide if wireless only is right for you.

CAN YOU HELP D.C. CONSUMERS COMPARE THE BOTTOM LINE WHEN CONSIDERING SWITCHING FROM LANDLINE TO EXCLUSIVE CELL PHONE USE?

Yes. OPC offers a "Phone Bill Clinic" to help consumers read their phone bills and understand the fine print in their wireless contracts, as well as answer basic service questions. To take advantage of this free service, call OPC at 202.727.3071 for an appointment.

ARE ORDINARY PEOPLE REALLY GIVING UP THEIR LANDLINES OR IS THIS JUST MEDIA HYPE?

The short answers – Yes, and no, it's not just hype, not any more.

Recent studies have shown close to 12% of U.S. households have switched from traditional landlines to cellular phones for ALL their phone service needs. According to *USA Today*, the number of cell phone-only households has quadrupled since 2003. While there may be little landline to landline competition in the local residential market, numbers show cell phones gaining headway in the landline marketplace.

¹ WRC- TV 4, NBC 4 (July 26, 2007).

² The segment can be found in its entirety on NBC-4 (WRC-TV4)'s website at www.nbc4.com/consumer/113763660/details.html

³ "Cutting the Cord," www.nbc4.com/consumer/113763660/details.html. Also see Tracey Wong and Robert W. Ahrens, "Going Without a Landline," *USA Today*, July 30, 2007, Lifeline, D 1.

WHAT ABOUT ROAMING CHARGES?⁴ ALL MY CALLS MAY NOT BE WITHIN MY HOME CALLING AREA.⁵ HOW CAN I MAKE SURE I CAN MAKE AND RECEIVE THE CALLS I WANT AND THAT THE ROAMING CHARGES WON'T COST A FORTUNE?

According to the Telecommunications Research and Action Center (TRAC), "new calling plans that do away with roaming charges and include long distance charges are becoming the standard offering for most digital (cellular) services."⁶

THERE ARE SOME PHONE SERVICES I NEED, CALLER ID, VOICE MAIL, CALL WAITING, AND THREE-WAY CALLING, HOW DO I KNOW WHICH COMPANY HAS THE BEST DEAL?

Research! Research! Research!

Many cellular phone service plans have standard features like Caller ID, Call Waiting, Call Forwarding, Three-Way Calling, and Voice Mail. On the flip side, many providers of local phone service charge extra for these services, even if advertised as "bundled" services or a package deal.

The best way to know whether you are getting the most for your money is thoroughly research your options to determine which plans have the features best for you.

If you need help deciding which plan is right for you, call for an appointment with OPC's Phone Bill Clinic at 202.727.3071.

I GET SO MANY CALLS FROM TELEMARETERS ON MY LANDLINE, I DON'T WANT TO WASTE MY MINUTES TALKING WITH THEM. HOW CAN I AVOID THIS?

According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), "contrary to claims made in e-mails circulating on the Internet, cell phone numbers are NOT being released to telemarketers, and you will NOT soon be getting telemarketing calls on your cell phone. FCC regulations prohibit telemarketers from using automated dialers to call cell phone numbers. Automated dialers are standard in the industry, so most telemarketers are barred from calling consumers on their cell phones without their consent."⁷

WHEN IS "CUTTING THE CORD" THE BEST OPTION?

Again, this is a personal decision. But among the questions you might ask yourself:

- ⇒ Are you a young adult or an "empty nester?"
- ⇒ Do you already own a cell phone and make most calls from it?
- ⇒ Do you want maximum mobility and privacy? (Cell phone numbers are not in a listed directory unless you request a listing.)
- ⇒ Do you have great cell phone reception EVERYWHERE in your home?



⁴Roaming charges occur when a wireless phone customer makes or receives calls outside their home calling area and uses the facilities of another wireless provider.

⁵The home calling area is generally considered the geographical area covered by the wireless carrier's network.

⁶Information can be found on the TRAC website on the "Cutting Cord" page at <http://www.trac.orrdconsumer/tips-for-cutting-the-cord.html>

⁷FTC education circular, "The Truth About Cell Phones and the Do Not Call Registry." (Jan. 19, 2006)

WHAT IS THE DOWNSIDE TO GOING COMPLETELY WIRELESS?



◆ When making a 911 call, a traditional landline gives the dispatcher an exact address, but a wireless 911 call may not give a precise location.

- ◆ During large scale emergencies, cell phone systems may be disabled or be overwhelmed or transmitters may lose power, and your call will not go through.
- ◆ High volume call users may exceed plan minutes, making higher cell phone bills higher.
- ◆ Cutting traditional phone service may eliminate your ability to access other services like satellite television, high speed (DSL) Internet, and home security systems



If you need more information on switching between traditional landline service and exclusive cell phone use, visit the following web sites:

Telecommunications Research and Action Center (www.trac.org)
CTIA - The Wireless Association (www.ctia.org)