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Permissive 10-digit dialing launches Nov. 5

BOISE (October 28, 2016) – Beginning Nov. 5, Idahoans can start getting accustomed to 10-digit dialing when placing local calls. That date kicks off a nine-month “permissive dialing period,” before mandatory 10-digit dialing begins in August 2017 to accommodate a second area code in the state.

The second area code – “986” – will be issued to new telephone numbers beginning next fall. Assigning the 986 code to only new numbers means that no existing numbers will need to be changed. However, all users will need to dial 10-digits (area code, plus prefix, plus 4-digit number) to have calls completed. Long-distance or toll calls on landlines will require a “1” before the area code, the same as long-distance calls now require.

The second area code is necessary because numbers under the 208 code are running out, due primarily to increased use of cell phones, the Internet, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), and other advancing technologies.

The nine-month permissive dialing period will also include an educational campaign from telecommunication providers. “The commission, as well as the telecommunications industry, wanted to allow plenty of time for customers to prepare for the change and get used to 10-digit dialing,” said Paul Kjellander, president of the Idaho Public Utilities Commission.

Most telecommunications devices, even landline phones, now have number storage capability that allows customers to program numbers into their phones and reach their contacts with the press of one or two buttons. Over the next nine months, customers should change the numbers they have programmed into their phones to include the area code. When mandatory 10-digit dialing begins next August, all calls, even local calls, without an area code will not be completed. Callers will get a recording telling them to hang up and dial again and include the area code.

Local calls on landline phones will still not cost anything, even though dialing the area code will be required. The move to a second area code will not impact rates.

Callers will still dial just three digits when calling 911, 211, 411 and 811.

Customers should ensure all services such as automatic dialing equipment, software or other types of equipment recognize 986 as a valid area code. Examples include life-safety systems, facsimile machines, Internet dial-up numbers, alarm and security systems, security gates, ankle monitors, speed-dialers, call-forwarding settings and voicemail services. Contact your medical alert or security provider if you are not sure whether your equipment needs to be reprogrammed to accommodate 10-digit dialing.

Idaho is one of few states that still has one area code. The 208 code was issued in 1947. In August 2001, Neustar, Inc., the administrator of the North American Numbering Plan, projected that Idaho would run out of available numbers under its 208 area code by 2003. In response, the commission implemented various numbers conservation plans that have been successful in delaying a second area code by 15 years.

While the commission acknowledged that 10-digit dialing may be inconvenient for some, the move to 10-digit dialing is inevitable due to advancing technology, regardless of whether Idaho had to acquire a second area code. Developing technology “will eventually drive seven-digit dialing into obsolescence,” the commission said. “Thus, any future dialing change and relief planning will be eased by the implementation of 10-digit dialing now rather than later.”

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