

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

### Regulated telecommunications companies

<b>Company</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Albion Telephone Corp.</b>	Albion
<b>Cambridge Telephone Co.</b>	Cambridge
<b>CenturyLink*</b>	Boise
<b>CenturyTel of Idaho, Inc.*</b>	Salt Lake City, UT
<b>CenturyTel of the Gem State*</b>	Salt Lake City, UT
<b>Citizens Telecommunications Company of Idaho*</b>	Beaverton, OR
<b>Columbine, dba Silver Star Communications</b>	Freedom, WY
<b>Direct Communications Rockland, Inc.</b>	Rockland
<b>Fremont Telecom, Inc.</b>	Missoula, MT
<b>Frontier Communications Northwest, Inc.*</b>	Beaverton, OR
<b>Inland Telephone Co.</b>	Roslyn, WA
<b>Midvale Telephone Company</b>	Midvale
<b>Oregon-Idaho Utilities, Inc.</b>	Nampa
<b>Pine Telephone System, Inc.</b>	Halfway, OR
<b>Potlach Telephone Company*</b>	Kendrick
<b>Rural Telephone Company</b>	Glenns Ferry

\* These companies are no longer rate regulated; however, they are still regulated for customer service.

## Commission suspends ITSAP surcharge, leaves unchanged TRS assessment

State regulators have suspended a surcharge that helps low-income Idahoans maintain access to local dial-tone service for medical and other emergencies.

It's the third consecutive year the Idaho Public Utilities Commission has [suspended the surcharge](#) used to fund the Idaho Telecommunications Service Assistance Program (ITSAP), which provides qualified applicants with a monthly discount of \$2.50 for landline and cell phone service.

The Commission determines the surcharge annually, while the state Department of Health and Welfare administers the program.

To be eligible for ITSAP assistance, the applicant must be the head of a household and meet eligibility criteria determined by the Department of Health and Welfare.

In addition to ITSAP, a federal program, [Lifeline](#), provides \$9.25 per month to help qualifying low income residents access phone and broadband service.

The number of Idaho residents receiving financial assistance through ITSAP has fallen significantly in recent years, from an average of 27,539 per month in 2010 to an average of 1,787 per month in 2018. From 2017 to 2018, the number of recipients dropped 30 percent.

As participation has declined, so has the amount of the monthly surcharge, from 13 cents for each line in 1998, to 3 cents in 2014. The Commission lowered it to 1 cent in 2016, and has suspended the surcharge every year since then.

As a result, Idaho residents will not see the surcharge on their phone bills in 2019.

In a related case, the [Commission decided](#) to also leave unchanged the funding mechanisms for the Idaho Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS), which assists individuals with hearing and speech impairments.

TRS allows those individuals to use telephones via a relay center that converts, or relays, oral conversations to text-type, and vice versa. The relay center also provides speech-to-speech, Spanish-to-Spanish, video and Internet relay services.

TRS is funded by an assessment on residential and business lines of 2 cents per month, in addition to a charge on intrastate long-distance calls \$0.0002 per minute.

Use of the service is declining due to cell-phone texting and the availability of similar Internet based services.

In 2018, the relay center handled 10,698 minutes of traffic, a 12-percent decrease from calendar year 2017.

## USF Surcharge modified

Faced with declining revenue as Idahoans increasingly abandon land line phone service, in August 2017 the Commission raised a monthly surcharge on land lines and questioned the sustainability of the Idaho Universal Service Fund (IUSF).

The fund was established in 1988 to ensure all Idahoans have access to local telephone service at reasonable rates.

This is accomplished by taking revenue collected from a surcharge on land-line users and long-distance call minutes, and distributing it to telecommunications carriers that meet eligibility requirements.

Over the last several years, however, revenue has been insufficient to cover distributions. The trend prompted the Commission to raise the monthly surcharge on each residential line to 25 cents, up from 12 cents, and to 44 cents for each business line, up from 20 cents.

The change took effect Sept. 1, 2017.

The cost for each minute of a long-distance call also increased, from ½ cent per minute to 0.9 cents per minute.

The changes have allowed the fund to meet its obligations for the 2019 fiscal year, and has momentarily stabilized the fund.

The Commission made a minor change to the rates associated with the IUSF. The Commission recently lowered the per minute surcharge of a long-distance call from 0.9 cents to 0.7 cents, and determined that the IUSF surcharges should be maintained at 25 cents per residential line, and 44 cents per business line.

The Idaho Public Utilities Commission establishes the surcharges each fall, and they remain in effect for a 12-month period beginning Oct. 1.

The IUSF was created through the Idaho Telecommunications Act of 1988 in order to ensure all Idahoans have access to phone service at reasonable rates. Disbursements from the fund allow rural telephone companies to keep their rates at no more than 25 percent above rates in more urban areas.