



IDAHO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Case No. QWE-T-03-10, Order No. 29270

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PUC approves Qwest request to close Boise, Pocatello payment centers

BOISE – The Idaho Public Utilities Commission has approved a request by Qwest Corporation to close its two remaining customer payments centers in Boise and Pocatello. The centers, on 999 Main St. in Boise and on 455 W. Lewis in Pocatello, will close on July 31.

The centers are the last two still operating within Qwest's 14-state territory.

The centers offer customers an opportunity to pay their bills in person and in cash, if they so choose. Qwest maintains that operating the centers costs more than \$211,000 per year, not including the cost of renting space and utilities. There are three employees in the Pocatello center and two in Boise who, according to the company, will be eligible for transfers to other positions within the company.

According to Qwest, the average cost of processing a payment through the Pocatello and Boise centers is \$2.27 and \$3 respectively. That compares to a cost of 11 cents of processing a payment through the mail.

The vast majority of customers now pay by mail, or by visiting walk-in "payment agent locations," which are non-Qwest businesses that agree to accept Qwest payments.

The company estimates that use of the two customer service centers has declined 38 percent in recent years from 112,820 payments processed in 1996 to 70,126 in 2002.

The commission said Qwest could close the payment centers as long as other methods of making payments, including the locations of walk-in payment agents, are prominently posted at the centers and on the company's Web site. Payment agent locations that charge a fee for processing a Qwest payment must clearly post a statement informing customers of a fee or service charge. The commission also said the company should make a concerted effort to locate a payment agent center closer to Boise's downtown area.

According to the company, 84 percent of its customers make their payments by mail. Others may use the payment agent locations or arrange with Qwest to have automatic withdrawals from their checking account or pay by credit or debit card. Customers can also call a Qwest billing customer and pay from their checking account by providing a check routing number.

The commission noted, with some regret, the end of an era when nearly all utilities and railroads, including Qwest's predecessors, had local offices in many of the areas they served. Over time, these local offices have been consolidated into regional offices and then, as technology advanced, to a centralized or single offices serving multiple states.

"It is true that closure of the customer payment centers may disrupt the routine of customers utilizing these centers, and it does eliminate the last places in the state to speak with a Qwest representative in person," the commission said. "However, there are alternative ways for customers to pay their Qwest bills including the numerous local payment agencies." The commission also noted the customer payment centers' declining use and the savings of \$200,000 that will benefit all customers since that expense will no longer be included to calculate customer rates.

Any person interested in this order may petition the Commission for reconsideration by no later than July 17. A complete copy of the order as well as other documents filed in this case can be accessed on the commission's Web site at www.puc.state.id.us. Click on "File Room," then on "Recent Orders and Notices" and scroll down to Order No. 29270, Case No. QWE-T-03-10.

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Boise payment agent locations include All Makes Vacuums, 615 N. Orchard; Boise Box Office, 111 Broadway, Suite 133; Mr. Payroll, 6350 Fairview; Ship N Check, 8469 W. Franklin; and four locations on Insta Cash at 8411 Fairview, 6942 W. State, 111 Broadway and 8618 W. Orchard.

Pocatello payment locations include: R Place, 245 Riverside Court; Ridley's, 911 N. Main; and Super Save Drug, 701 E. Center.