

CUB helps consumers lower bills

June 13, 2008 - 10:01PM

With consumers paying more these days for food, gasoline and energy to heat and cool their home, it's nice to know there is at least one bill they may be able to reduce.

The Citizens Utility Board has been holding a series of clinics at shopping malls around Illinois to teach consumers how they can lower their telephone bills. The next such clinic will be held Tuesday at Alton Square.

CUB officials say telephone customers who follow their tips are saving an average of \$200 a year on their phone bills, and who among us couldn't use a little savings about now?

CUB designed the Consumer's Choice phone plans under a legal settlement with AT&T, and phone customers statewide now are saving hundreds of dollars a year. That's especially true for customers in some markets, such as Chicagoland, that have seen AT&T raise their prices for local calls and their monthly line charges.

Fortunately, consumers can avoid these price increases by switching to one of the Consumer's Choice plans, because those prices are frozen through 2010.

By making the Consumer's Choice for local service and switching to Pioneer Telephone for long distance, the average AT&T customer can save \$20 a month. Also, consumers referred by CUB get an automatic \$20 credit from Pioneer.

CUB also has a list of "Rules to Live By for AT&T Callers" that can help consumers save on their phone bills. The rules are:

Beware of "fixed-rate" plans. Most people pay too much for calling plans that don't fit their needs. For local service, most callers are better off with AT&T's standard per-call rates or one of three new low-cost packages that are being offered, thanks to a CUB-negotiated settlement.

Shop for a low-priced Local Toll/Long-distance plan. Don't settle for anything more than 5 cents per minute for these calls. CUB now has negotiated an automatic \$20 credit with one of the best long-distance plans in the country, so ask about the "CUB Credit."

Use your cell phone to reduce your overall telecommunications cost. If you consistently have wireless minutes left at the end of a month, use them to make Local Toll or long-distance calls that you normally would make from your home landline, at extra cost to you.

Consider whether you really need AT&T's Line-Backer insurance plan at a cost of \$7 a month. This plan covers repairs to the phone wires inside the walls of your home, but such repairs are needed only once every 30 years, on average.

Finally, don't pay for directory assistance, because there now are new, free directory assistance services.

When CUB makes the call to help you save money on your phone bills, it pays to listen. It's nice to be able to reduce one of your monthly bills for a change.