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CUB provides ways to save on phone bill

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When it comes to saving money on your phone bill, the telephone company might be the worst place to look.

"The customer service representatives (at telephone companies) are under a lot of pressure to sell high cost packages," said Sarah Moskowitz, outreach director at the Citizens Utility Board, a utility watchdog group. "They don't really have any obligation to tell people there might be a better package for what they need."

Moskowitz, who took part in a clinic at the Northlake Library on Wednesday, July 9, said that on average people can save about \$17 a month or nearly \$200 a year on their landline phone bills.

Tip number one is to look at your phone bill and see what you are actually paying for. If you have call waiting, caller ID or other features you don't use, get rid of them.

Second, consider getting rid of Line Backer, an optional insurance plan that covers repairs to the wires in your home for \$6.99 a month.

"Its very rarely necessary," Moskowitz said. "If ever something were to go wrong with your wiring inside, you don't have to have AT&T come in."

Third, don't call 411 or 555-1212 for directory assistance. Those cost \$1 or \$2 for each call. Instead, use a free service such as (800) FREE-411. The only difference is you have to listen to a five-second ad.

Next, be aware that CUB negotiated three low cost plans for local service with AT&T. See sidebar for details.

For long distance calls, Moskowitz recommended avoiding AT&T. To find companies, check in the front of the local white pages. CUB likes a company called Pioneer, which Moskowitz said has been the cheapest in Illinois for long distance for years.

To compare long distance rates, check out the web sites www.abtolls.com or www.citizensutilityboard.org

Another option is calling cards. The best prices are found at big box stores though Moskowitz advised reading the small print for hidden charges.

Finally, Moskowitz said she gets a lot of questions about "bundled" services, where you get a single bill for phone calls, internet connection and cable TV.

"They make it harder for you to shop around," Moskowitz said. "The bill is not itemized. It's harder to compare. Also, ask about the introductory rate."



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