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Watchdog group says cell phone users can save money

By Scott Fitzgerald, The Southern

Wednesday, August 19, 2009 11:35 PM CDT

MARION - The average cell phone user in Illinois is getting charged with more than seven hours worth of unused minutes in calling time a year, according to numbers from the Citizens Utility Board.

Combined with services callers may see on their bills labeled as "regulatory fees," the average cell phone owner footing the monthly bill is paying an average of \$331 annually that essentially amounts to nothing but pure profit for their carrier.

"Most cell phone owners have too many minutes based on their cell phone needs," said Bryan McDaniel, a senior policy analyst/government liaison with the CUB, a nonprofit agency watchdog organization created by the Illinois legislature and based in Chicago.

McDaniel stopped in Marion on Wednesday at Carnegie Public Library to distribute the latest CUB consumer report - "Surviving the Cell-phone Jungle: Simple Steps to Rein in Wireless Costs."

Using data that until now had been collected by the wireless industry only, CUB people analyzed more than 7,000 consumer cell phone bills by utilizing an online tool - www.cubcellphonesaver.com - that is available to everyone at no cost.

And the results were evident that cell phone users are getting nickel and dimed to death for unnecessary features such as elaborate voice plans hardly utilized to the fullest; unnecessary handset insurance fees; useless extra such as roadside assistance and 411 charges; and various text-messaging plans, he added.

McDaniel suggested cell phone users utilize the cell phone saver online tool to cut down on their cell phone costs and review some of the fine print such as handset insurance which he said is basically useless unless someone's cell phone is destroyed.

The five top cell phone carriers - AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular and Verizon - have spent enormous amounts of money advertising various caller plans but offer little if anything to consumers on cost-savings, McDaniel contends.

"They (carriers) have the advertising. We (CUB) provide the information," he said.

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