

## CUB research finds ways consumers can save on cell phone bills



By Pamela Kay Schmalenberger Illustration

Cell phone graphic.jpg

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By Matt Hawkins  
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Illinoisans spend \$27.61 more each month on cell phone bills than they should and leave an average of 7 hours, 19 minutes of allotted talking time unused.

Analysis of 7,000 cell phone bills by the Citizens Utility Board found these figures and others concerning cell phone usage in the state.

"Most people are not on the right calling plan, or they're still paying for 411 these days," CUB senior policy analyst and government liaison Bryan McDaniel. "We're trying to go on the offensive. They have advertising, we have information."

CUB looked at bills submitted through the CUB's Cell Phone Saver Web site, [www.cubcellphonesaver.com](http://www.cubcellphonesaver.com). The Web site analyzed plans through the nation's top five carriers — AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular and Verizon.

Citizens can enter their monthly bill into the Web site to see where they might save money. The site looks at the user's current carrier for savings, then looks at other carriers for comparison.

Research found cell phone users are overpaying \$331 annually. People pay for items like insurance, 411, roadside assistance and carrier surcharges and fees.

McDaniel said surcharges and fees are 13 percent of bill charges. Those charges are for items like termination and activation fees, equipment shipping or administrative charges.

"I think these should be in the phone price," McDaniel said. "It's truth in advertising. The fact you're paying regulatory fees means it's going straight to the bottom line."

He urged consumers to research electronic communication charges in general, be it cell, internet, land lines or television packages.

"You have to take time to play the game," McDaniel said. "Keep your eye on bills. In the industry, they treat customers who have been with them longer worse than new ones because they're trying to get new customers."

### **SEVEN TOOLS TO ESCAPE THE CELL PHONE JUNGLE**

The Citizens Utility Board offers ways consumers can save on cell phone bills:

1. Don't pay for unused minutes — pick the smallest calling plan possible and monitor bills for several months to make sure the plan fits needs.
2. Don't pay for unused text messages — consider a pay-as-you-go plan instead of a large package.
3. Don't pay for insurance — coverage often is so limited it may be useless if you need a new phone.
4. Never dial 411 — use free services like 1-800 FREE 411 or 1-800-INFO FAST.
5. Watch for extra charges you didn't ordered.
6. Consider a pre-paid option like Cricket, Boost or Virgin Mobile. These don't come with long contracts.
7. Use CUB's Cell Phone Saver occasionally to monitor your bill and to help find a cheaper plan.

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