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## **CUB: Ill. cell phone users overpay \$359 a year**

By Wailin Wong

Posted Oct. 11 at 12:15 p.m.

Mobile phone users in Illinois are paying hundreds of dollars every month for unused minutes and unnecessary services, the Citizens Utility Board said in a report released Monday.

CUB studied 4,400 cell bills entered into its online [Cellphone Saver](#) between August 2009 and July 2010 and determined that those consumers are overpaying by an average of \$359 a year.

The Cellphone Saver allows users can upload a PDF of their wireless bill from one of the five major carriers — AT&T, Verizon Wireless, Sprint, T-Mobile and U.S. Cellular — and receive a report about how to cut costs.

CUB conducted a similar study in 2009, analyzing 6,985 bills entered into the Cellphone Saver. Last year, the lost savings added up to an average of \$331 a year.

The culprits identified by CUB remain largely unchanged from last year. CUB Executive Director David Kolata said wasted minutes continue to be an issue, with consumers averaging more than six hours of unused calling time every month because even plans with the lowest amount of minutes are too big for typical use.

The other common problems are paying for extra services that may not be a good value, such as insurance, directory assistance and roadside assistance. In addition, CUB said consumers unwittingly opt into programs that tack monthly recurring charges onto their bills, often for downloads such as ringtones and wallpapers.

Kolata said consumers that use fewer than 300 minutes of calling time a month could be better served by switching to a prepaid wireless provider. The Cellphone Saver does not cover prepaid operators, but CUB is hoping to upgrade the system to include those options, Kolata said.

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Read more about the topics in this post: [Cell Phone Saver](#), [Citizen's Utility Board](#), [David Kolata](#)

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## 19 comments:



1. [Laughing Gravy](#) Oct. 11 at 1:21 pm

Every 90 days I buy 120 minutes of time for my TracFone at Walgreen's and pay \$20.

That's \$20 every three months – no need to pay more for cell phone service.



2. [Cell Phone Dude](#) Oct. 11 at 1:34 pm

@ Laughing Gravy – 120 mins for 3 months? The average cell phone user would burn through that in 3 days.



3. [Scottm1207](#) Oct. 11 at 1:35 pm

When this leftist group starts to whine about the multitude of taxes and fees that get added on to the phone bills, I'll start to listen to them.



4. [Rob](#) Oct. 11 at 2:03 pm

Yeah, all this CUB group ever does is complain, complain, complain, complain.

When was the last time any utility ever did anything good according to these guys?

You know CUB you have to say something nice every once in a while or else you lose all credibility. Otherwise you're just a bunch of useless crybabies.



5. [james](#) Oct. 11 at 2:05 pm

I'm with Laughing – I spend a bit more, \$100 for 1000 minutes, but that will last 3 months. Unless you are in business for yourself, there isn't a need to use a cell phone that much.



6. [Laughing Gravy](#) Oct. 11 at 3:09 pm

Really? In only three days you spend two hours talking on your phone? Why?



7. [PATRICK](#) Oct. 11 at 3:31 pm

The cell phone companies are not the only ones to over charge us. We audit phone bills everyday for our customers. We average 15% to 40% savings by independently comparing all of the cost factors and recommending the best combination of vendors and services.



8. [Gary](#) Oct. 11 at 3:34 pm

I think CUB does some great work looking out for us, but I agree with scottm1207. CUB rarely, if ever, investigates all the money wasted on taxes and fees placed on our utility bills. I sure hope they have our back if cap and trade ever gets passed by congress and our utilities go up 50% or so to "save the planet". Furthermore, does CUB ever look into water bills? I would like to know how much we are getting bent over on our water bills by local governments. It seems that whenever towns need to make up for budget shortfalls they raise water fees.



9. [joeschmo](#) Oct. 11 at 4:00 pm

Face it. Nobody really pays attention to their bills whether it be the cell phone or cable TV. They just figure bills are a part of life and get screwed. Unfortunately, these are the same people that the Tribune

hauls out when the economy is bad and they scream, “oh woe is me, I have so many bills and I can’t make ends meet.” It falls on deaf ears for me.

Pay attention to what you DON’T need, it’ll save you tons of cash.



10. [Stephen Adams](#) Monday at 4:11 pm

Of course, they don’t mention that pre-paid plans are often very limited and are usually a VERY bad idea for people who use data. They also don’t mention all the regulatory fees, many of which CUB backs (e.g. universal service fees, etc).

Of course, CUB also gets free mailing of their propaganda courtesy of the State – the Secretary of State is required by Law to mail out their propaganda.

CUB also believes that electricity, cellular service, cable service and other utilities can be provided for free. Seriously. They think that infrastructure such as power plants, etc, magically appear and consumers should not pay for them.

Face it, CUB is just another progressive lobbying group who has the ultimate goal of socializing everything in sight...



11. [bobby](#) Monday at 4:12 pm

I find that there aren’t very good options in most cell phone plans. It’s either pay x for a bajillion features, or for ten dollars less get no options at all. It ends up being worth it to have the extra features.



12. [TheIdahoKid](#) Monday at 4:15 pm

I’m happy when cell phone yappers get shafted, I spend nothing on cell phone, cause I won’t use one of the brain sapping devices, I hope there’s long term problems with them. serve them right.....



13. [ff](#) Monday at 4:22 pm

CUB is one of your best allies for consumers.

If you want private companies to look after our interest, you’ll be waiting for a long time, but you can also just do as AT&T and Verizon tell you and you can be sure to be overpaying by about 40%... hey, if you want to continue overpaying there is no group that can save you from that, either left or right wing. Good life!



14. [kathy mc](#) Monday at 5:07 pm

Most ppl would be able to get by with the prepaids if they realized that the plans were almost identical to the postpaids. I started saving \$53/month when I switched from US Cell to Straighttalk. For \$32/month I

have 1000 vm, 1000 text & 30 mg wireless. With USCell I didn't even have text for \$85/month. I had free incoming calls but 1/3 to 1/2 of my calls would go to voice mail without even ringing so that would generate a cost to listen to vm & then call the ppl back. This happened all of the time even in areas where I had full signal coverage. I believe that this should be investigated since this seems like it is very likely a programming issue to avoid having ppl talk on "free incoming" when they can drop the call in to VM & then when you make the call back you are back on the USCell meter. Of course USCell denies it but that doesn't mean that it's not what they are doing.

The only thing that I hate is that the customer service is off shore but it was the same with USCell too so it's the same difference.



15. [Stephen Adams](#) Monday at 8:27 pm

CUB is not an ally of consumers. They are a special interest with their own agenda. Progressives love to tell you that they are looking out for your best interests, but in nearly every case, they hurt the very people they purport to help. Want to know why the US has some of the worst infrastructure? Because groups like CUB won't allow providers to recoup their investments. Want to know why new services aren't available? Because groups like CUB interfere with companies trying to provide them.

Of course, the companies aren't sweetness and light either, but CUB is *\*exactly\** like them in its behavior.

As for cell bills, not sure why you were paying \$85/mo to US Cell – my family plan with 5 phones and data on one only costs \$110, with unlimited text, 600m, unlimited calls to other phones, unlimited nights and weekends. No pre-paid plan I'm aware of can provide that. CUB isn't doing me any favors.

As for not using cell phones – that's your choice. But there is no independent, verified scientific evidence for problems with low-power radio waves. And the value of the devices is way too high to stop using them over rumors, innuendo and incomplete information.



16. [Don](#) Monday at 8:31 pm

Why feel sorry for some silly consumers who are willing to pay through the nose?



17. [kathy mc](#) Monday at 9:27 pm

@Stephen – I only paid that much for as long as I had to because I live in a rural area & until Feb of this year I did not have any reasonable option for hi-speed internet. As soon as I was able to have a hi-speed connection @ home I dumped the data plan & the Blackberry & am quite happy with the prepaid cell phone that I have now. I will NEVER sign another contract with a cell phone company.. No need to – it's a ripoff designed to benefit only the cell phone companies & the naive & gullible customers get suckered in with a cheap/free flashy new phone.

I am a single lady & only need 1 line. I agree that the family/multi user plans are a real bargain compared to single line plans.



18. [JOHN C](#) Tuesday at 4:36 a.m.

Scottm is totally oorrect, the leftist groups ignore all the taxes, fees, and mandatory charges that get PASSED on to the all utility bills. CUB gets tazpayer money from the legislature and it is “conveniently” not in their “charter” to criticize the HIGH TAXES and HIGH FLAT RATE FEES utilities charge ALL Customers. About 20 percent of your bill is for FEEs and taxes!!!



19.

[007](#) Tuesday at 10:10 a.m.

Virgin Mobile user her, \$20 once every 3 months to keep the account “active” and the unused balance rolls over. Right now I have over \$200 built up, but then I’m not a typical American walking through Wal-Mart with the phone glued to my ear yapping about nothing to my friends and family. I have NO sympathy for any of the people complaining — don’t like it? Put the phone down. Does your BFF really need to know that you’re in line at the pharmacy right now waiting for your birth control prescription and that you don’t know where you’re going next? Really?

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