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Why the need for new area codes?

The need for new area codes in the United States has been prompted by several factors. First and foremost, we are running out of telephone numbers due to the explosive demand for communications technology. In addition to continued growth in home and business telephones, the industry has seen a rapid growth in wireless phones, pagers, fax machines, modems and other telecommunications devices.

Increased competition in the telecommunications industry has also played a role in depleting the number of available telephone exchanges. As new companies enter the market, they request and are assigned specific telephone prefixes (i.e., the first three digits of your seven-digit telephone number). Each prefix comes with a block of 10,000 telephone numbers.

How are new area codes assigned?

NeuStar, Inc., oversees the North American Numbering Plan, which includes the United States, Canada, Bermuda and 15 Caribbean Islands. This responsibility was formerly held by Bellcore until January 19, 1998, when it transferred to Lockheed Martin IMS. The Federal Communications Commission approved the transfer of Lockheed Martin's Communication Industry Services division to NeuStar, Inc. on November 17, 1999.

When industry forecasts indicate that a particular area code region will run out of numbers, NeuStar convenes an industry-wide team to determine an appropriate solution. The industry team consists of representatives from companies that provide telecommunications services within the affected area code region.

The team operates under area code guidelines developed by the Industry Numbering Committee. Once the industry reaches consensus on an area code relief plan, it may be submitted to the state regulatory authority for approval.

Are there North American Numbering Plan area codes for locations outside of the United States?

The North American Numbering Plan, explained in an earlier question, has assigned area codes outside of the U.S. For example, area code 809 is located in the Dominican Republic, area code 284 is located in the British Virgin Islands, and area code 876 is located in Jamaica. Customers dialing these area codes from within the United States may incur international long distance charges. For more information on international area code scams, go to the [Protecting Our Customers](#) information.

What are toll-free numbers?

Toll-free numbers are numbers that begin with one of the following three-digit area codes: 800, 866, 877 and 888. Charges for calls to toll-free numbers are almost always paid by the called party instead of the calling party. The exception would be if you have a pre-existing relationship with the company or charge the call to a credit card. For more information on toll-free numbers and your rights, visit the Federal Trade Commission's Web site at www.ftc.gov/consumer and select the Unauthorized Charges option in the Telemarketing & Telephone Services menu.

What is the charge for calling 900 numbers?

The charge for calling 900 numbers vary and are determined by the service provider offering the product or service (i.e. weather , horoscope). To avoid unexpected charges, be aware of the cost to dial the 900 number before you call. For more information on 900 numbers and your rights, visit the Federal Trade Commission's Web site at www.ftc.gov/consumer and select the Unauthorized Charges option in the Telemarketing & Telephone Services menu.

What are the "new area codes" and how are they different from the old generation of codes in place prior to 1995?

Unlike the former telephone numbering plan which limited the second digit of area codes to a "1" or "0" (e.g. "703" or "414"), the new numbering plan says anything goes! Under the old plan, we had 144 area codes. But the last of the original area codes -- 610 -- took effect in eastern Pennsylvania in 1994. The first of the new generation area codes took effect in Alabama in January 1995, when area code 205 was split to create area code 334.

As a result, those businesses using on-site telephone switching equipment known as Private Branch Exchange (PBX) may need to acquire software upgrades to complete calls to the new area codes which do not have a "1" or "0" as the middle number. This is necessary so that businesses can continue to reach numbers within the state as well as in the other areas across the country that are implementing new area codes.

How will these new area codes affect me or the way I dial?

It depends on whether you are making calls from home or a business, and whether you are getting a new area code or simply making calls to a new area code. At a minimum, you need to know when the phone numbers of friends, family members, or companies you do business with change. Note those new numbers in your address book and re-program your speed dialing. If your area code region is assigned a new area code as a part of an "overlay" you will be required to dial 10 or 11 digits to complete local calls; however, if your area code region is a part of a "geographic split" and your geographic area is assigned the new area code, you will need to change your area code.

Businesses getting a new area code need to communicate that information to all of their customers; update telephone directory listings and other advertising; reprint business cards and office stationary; and re-program office telephone equipment. Businesses who place calls to new area codes also need to re-program their telephone equipment, especially if they use a PBX.

How are the new area codes implemented?

Once a formal relief plan is announced, the telecommunications companies serving that area will begin an extensive customer education effort. Typically, there is an optional dialing period prior to the mandatory change. During this time, calls to the new area code may be dialed using either the old area code or the new code. The optional period will give consumers and businesses an opportunity to re-program numbers and get used to the new area code, and 10- or 11-digit dialing, if required, prior to the mandatory use of the new area code.

Will the new codes affect phone rates? For instance, will it cost more to place calls to cities with a new area code?

The addition of the new area codes will not affect the price of telephone calls placed over AT&T networks.

Will a new area code affect how we dial either local or long distance calls?

See specific dialing pattern information on the individual state's background page.

Will dialing 911 and calls to directory assistance change?

No. You will dial these numbers just as you always have.

If my area code changes, does that mean my seven-digit telephone number will change as well?

It's impossible to say if anyone will have to change his/her specific phone number until a specific relief plan is announced. An important consideration in making that decision, however, will be the overall impact a particular solution has on residents. A key objective for the industry is to minimize cost and inconvenience for area residents.

Will wireless phones have to change area codes as well?

It's impossible to say until a specific relief plan is announced, and then it depends on the service area of the individual wireless company.

Who should people call if they have questions?

Call your local telephone company.

Where can I find information about area codes in other parts of the country?

For industry information, visit the North American Numbering Plan Administration (NANPA) [web site](#). For maps and information on recent area code changes, visit www.att.com/areacodes.

Explain the difference between a "geographic split" and an "overlay plan."

Geographic Split - New area code created by designating new geographic boundaries. In most cases, this means taking an existing area code and dividing the geographic territory into two areas. Effect: The residents and businesses located in the geographic area that gets the new area code will have their area code changed to the new area code.

Overlay - Numbers with the new area code are assigned to customers acquiring new lines. For example, a new home owner may have a different area code from his/her next door neighbors. Effect: No changes for existing phone numbers, but all calls (local and long distance) must be dialed using 10 or 11 digits (see individual state pages for details).

With modern technology what it is today, why can't you just add numbers to the current area codes? While creative, this is not mathematically possible. The only way to create new telephone numbers is to create a new area code which, in turn, gives you access to more than 700 prefixes. Each prefix can accommodate up to 10,000 numbers. Hence, one new area code creates 7 to 8 million new telephone numbers.

What is "number pooling" and how does it affect area codes?

Number pooling is a method of conserving telephone numbers that is being implemented to help prolong the life of area codes. The idea is that, instead of assigning blocks of numbers to telephone companies in blocks of 10,000 numbers, numbers would be assigned in blocks of 1,000 each. This would cut down on the inefficiencies in the distribution of numbers. For example, if the XYZ telephone company sets up shop in Anytown, USA, it will need an inventory of telephone numbers to provide to customers. Under the traditional method of assigning numbers, the company would receive 10,000 numbers. But, what if the company only has 800 customers? The remaining 9,200 numbers go unused and are unavailable to other companies. With number pooling, the telephone company would receive an initial block of 1,000 numbers, which would allow it to serve its 800 customers and maintain a reasonable inventory of phone numbers for new growth.

This is a simplified example. Getting number pooling to work in the real world is a complicated, technical process. At this time, the Chicago area is a test location for number pooling in the United States. A special workshop, under the auspices of the Illinois Commerce Commission, is studying the issue.

For more information about number pooling, visit www.numberpool.org.