

CHAPTER 26. SUBSTANTIVE RULES APPLICABLE TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICE PROVIDERS.

Subchapter B. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PROTECTION.

§26.25. Issuance and Format of Bills.

- (a) **Application.** The provisions of this section apply to residential-customer bills issued by all certificated telecommunications utilities (CTUs). Only subsections (d)(3), (e)(1)(C) and (e)(7) of this section apply to a deregulated company holding a certificate of operating authority or to an exempt carrier under PURA §52.154.
- (b) **Purpose.** The purpose of this section is to specify the information that should be included in a user-friendly, simplified format for residential customer bills that include charges for local exchange telephone service.
- (c) **Frequency of bills and billing detail.** Bills of CTUs shall be issued monthly for any amount unless the bill covers service that is for less than one month, or unless through mutual agreement between the company and the customer a less frequent or more frequent billing interval is established. Through mutual agreement with the CTU, a customer may request and receive a bill with more detailed or less detailed information than otherwise would be required by the provisions of this section if the CTU also will provide the customer with detailed information on request.
- (d) **Billing information.**
- (1) All residential customers shall receive their bills via the United States mail, or other mail service, unless the customer agrees with the CTU to receive a bill through different means, such as electronically via the Internet.
 - (2) Customer billing sent through the United States mail, or other mail service, shall be sent in an envelope or by any other method that ensures the confidentiality of the customer's telephone number and/or account number.
 - (3) A CTU shall maintain by billing cycle the billing records for each of its accounts for at least two years after the date the bill is mailed. The billing records shall contain sufficient data to reconstruct a customer's billing for a given month. A copy of a customer's billing records may be obtained by the customer on request.
- (e) **Bill content requirements.** The following requirements apply to bills sent via the U.S. mail, or other mail service. Bills rendered via the Internet shall provide the information specified in this subsection in a readily discernible manner.
- (1) The first page of each residential customer's bill containing charges for local exchange telephone service shall include the following information, clearly and conspicuously displayed:
 - (A) the grand total amount due for all services being billed;
 - (B) the payment due date; and
 - (C) a notification of any change in the identity of a service provider. The notification should describe the nature of the relationship with the customer, including the description of whether the new service provider is the presubscribed local exchange or interexchange carrier. For purposes of this subparagraph, "new service provider" means a service provider that did not bill the customer for services during the service provider's last billing cycle. This definition shall include only providers that have continuing relationships with the customer that will result in periodic charges on the customer's bill, unless the service is subsequently canceled. This notification may be accomplished with a sentence that directs the customers to details of this change located elsewhere on the bill.
 - (D) If possible, the first page of the bill shall list each applicable telephone number or account number for which charges are being summarized on the bill. If such

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- inclusion is not possible, the first page shall show the main telephone number or account number, and subsequent pages shall clearly identify the additional numbers.
- (2) Each residential customer's bill shall include the following information in a clear and conspicuous manner that provides customers sufficient information to understand the basis and source of the charges in the bill:
 - (A) the service descriptions and charges for local service provided by the billing CTU;
 - (B) the service descriptions and charges for non-local services provided by the billing CTU;
 - (C) the service description, service provider's name, and charges for any services provided by parties other than the billing CTU, with a separate line for each different provider;
 - (D) applicable taxes, fees and surcharges, showing the specific amount associated with each charge;
 - (E) the billing period or billing end date; and
 - (F) an identification of those charges for which non-payment will not result in disconnection of basic local telecommunications service, along with an explicit statement that failure to pay these charges will not result in the loss of basic local service; or an identification of those charges that must be paid to retain basic local telecommunications service, along with an explicit statement that failure to pay these charges will result in the loss of basic local service.
 - (3) Charges must be accompanied by a brief, clear, non-misleading, plain-language description of the service being rendered. The description must be sufficiently clear in presentation and specific enough in content to enable customers to accurately assess the services for which they are being billed. Additionally, explanations shall be provided for any non-obvious abbreviations, symbols, or acronyms used to identify specific charges. The CTU shall use the term or acceptable abbreviation, in paragraph (7) of this subsection to the extent they apply to the customer's bill. If an abbreviation other than the acceptable abbreviation is used for the term, then the term must also be identified on the customer's bill. Terms and abbreviations may be completely capitalized, partially capitalized, not capitalized, hyphenated, or not hyphenated.
 - (4) Charges for bundled-service packages that include basic local telecommunications service are not required to be separately stated. However, a brief, clear, non-misleading, plain-language description of the services included in a bundled-service package is required to be provided either in the description or as a footnote.
 - (5) Each customer's bill shall include specific per-call detail for time-sensitive charges, itemized by service provider and by telephone or account number (if the customer's bill is for more than one such number). Each customer's bill shall include the rate and specific number of billing occurrences for per-use services, itemized by service provider and by telephone or account number. Additionally, time-sensitive charges and per-use charges may be displayed as subtotals in summary sections of the bill.
 - (6) Bills shall provide a clear and conspicuous toll-free number that a customer can call to resolve disputes and obtain information from the CTU. If the CTU is billing the customer for any services from another service provider, the bill shall identify the name of the service provider and provide a toll-free number that the customer can call to resolve disputes or obtain information from that service provider.
 - (7) Defined terms.
 - (A) **Federal excise tax** -- Federal tax assessed on non-usage sensitive basic local service that is billed separately from long distance service. Acceptable abbreviation: Fed excise tax.
 - (B) **Federal subscriber line charge** -- A charge that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allows a CTU to impose on its customers to recover costs

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associated with interstate access to the local telecommunications networks. The FCC does not require a CTU company to impose this charge, and the CTU does not remit the charge to the federal government. The charge may be used by the CTU to pay for a part of the cost of lines, wires, poles, conduit, equipment and facilities that provide interstate access to the local telecommunications network. Acceptable abbreviation: Fed subscriber line chg.

- (C) **Federal universal service fee** -- A federal fee for a fund that supports affordable basic phone service to all Americans, including low-income customers, schools, libraries, and rural health care providers. CTUs impose this fee to cover their required support for the fund. The fee is set by the FCC. Acceptable abbreviation: Fed universal svc fee.
 - (D) **Municipal right-of-way fee** -- A fee used to compensate municipalities for the use of their rights-of-way. Acceptable abbreviation: Municipal ROW fee.
 - (E) **Texas universal service** -- A state fee for a fund that supports affordable service to customers in high-cost rural areas, funds the Relay Texas service and related assistance for the hearing-disabled, and funds telecommunications services discounts for low-income customers (Lifeline). The fee is set by the Public Utility Commission.
 - (F) **9-1-1 fee** -- A fee used to fund the 9-1-1 telephone network that allows callers to reach a public safety agency when they dial the digits "9-1-1." The amount of the fee varies by region and is set by the Texas Commission on State Emergency Communications.
 - (G) **9-1-1 equalization fee** -- A fee used to provide financial support for regions where the 9-1-1 fee does not fully offset the cost of 9-1-1 service. The fee is imposed on each customer receiving intrastate long-distance service. The fee is set by the Texas Commission on State Emergency Communications.
- (f) **Compliance review of bill formats.** A CTU shall file for review a copy of any portion of its bill format that has not previously been reviewed and approved by the commission pursuant to this section. The CTU will be advised if the format does or does not comply with the requirements of this section. Two alternative projects will be established for such reviews. CTUs may submit new or altered bill formats in either of these projects as follows:
- (1) **Expedited review.** The commission staff shall establish a project for expedited reviews. CTUs may submit proposed new bills or bill format changes prior to implementation in the expedited review project. A notice of sufficiency or a notice of deficiency will be issued to the CTU within 15 business days. The CTU may appeal a notice of deficiency by requesting its submission be docketed for further review or may respond with a revised submission that corrects the deficiency within ten business days of the deficiency notice. The CTU's revised submission will be reviewed and either a notice of sufficiency or a notice of deficiency will be issued within 15 business days. This process will be repeated until the CTU's submission has received a notice of sufficiency or the CTU has requested that its submission be docketed as a contested case. A contested case may also be requested by commission staff to resolve disputes regarding the CTU's submission.
 - (2) **Annual review.** The commission staff shall establish a project for annual reviews. CTUs may choose to file bill format changes in the annual review project. If the CTU's bill format change has already been approved pursuant to paragraph (1) of this subsection, the CTU does not need to file the same changes under the annual review process. Submissions for annual review must be made between September 1st and October 1st each year. All submissions shall be responded to with a notice of sufficiency or deficiency issued no later than November 15th of that year. A CTU may appeal a notice of deficiency by requesting its submission be docketed for further review or may respond with a revised submission that

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corrects the deficiency within ten business days of the deficiency notice. Revised submissions will be reviewed within 15 business days and a new notice of either sufficiency or deficiency will be issued. This process will be repeated until the CTU's submission has received a notice of sufficiency or the CTU has requested that its submission be docketed as a contested case. A contested case may also be requested by commission staff to resolve disputes regarding the CTU's submission.

- (g) **Effective date.** The effective date of this section is June 1, 2010.