

Rural Customers are Experiencing Problems with Long Distance or Wireless Calling to Rural Areas Nationwide

Here are some FAQ's taken directly from the FCC's website to help you not only understand the problem but participate in a solution!

Rural consumers are reporting significant problems receiving long distance or wireless calls on their landline telephones.

- If you live in a rural area you may be among those experiencing these problems if you are aware that long distance or wireless callers are not able to get through to your telephone, or if the voice quality is often very poor once they do get through.
- If you live anywhere in the country and are having problems calling people or businesses in rural areas, you may also be experiencing the same problems.

I live in a rural area and I'm having trouble receiving calls.

If your landline telephone is working (for example, you can make calls and are receiving local calls) but you learn that long-distance or wireless callers have been unable to reach you at your home or business -- even when you are there or have an answering machine on -- you may be experiencing "**failure to complete**" problems.

Typical "**failure to complete**" symptoms include the following:

- Long distance or wireless callers tell you they repeatedly hear nothing or "dead air" for 10 seconds or more after they dial your number. If they stay on the line, the call may seem to be dropped or they may eventually hear a busy signal.
- Long distance or wireless callers tell you they repeatedly hear prolonged ringing on their end after they dial your number (e.g., the callers wait 10-20 rings before they finally hang up).
- Long distance or wireless callers tell you they repeatedly hear a recording such as "The number you have dialed is not in service" or "Your call cannot be completed as dialed" when they know they've correctly dialed your number.

Rural customers also report "**poor call quality**" problems. Typical symptoms include the following:

- Long distance or wireless callers tell you they repeatedly hear nothing or "dead air" for 10 seconds or more before hearing ringing and you answer your phone.
- Long distance or wireless callers tell you they repeatedly hear prolonged ringing (e.g., 10-20 times or more) before you answer the phone -- when you are sure the phone actually rang only a couple of times before you answered.

- Consistently after you answer a call, the voice quality is unacceptable. For example, one person cannot hear the other, the sound is choppy, there are awkward transmission delays after speaking, or there is an echo.
- Fax machines fail to interoperate once they have connected.

I'm having trouble calling someone in a rural area.

When calling a rural area, long distance or wireless callers may experience the following "**failure to complete**" symptoms:

- After you dial, you hear nothing or "dead air" for 10 seconds or more. If you stay on the line, the call may seem to be dropped or you may eventually hear a busy signal.
- After you dial, you hear as many as 10-20 rings even though you are reasonably sure someone should be there to answer or an answering machine should pick up.
- After you dial, you hear a recording such as "The number you have dialed is not in service" or "Your call cannot be completed as dialed" when you are sure that you've correctly dialed the number and the called phone is working.

Callers to rural areas also may experience the following "**poor call quality**" problems:

- After you dial, you hear nothing or "dead air" for 10 seconds or more (i.e., much longer than on other calls you make) before you hear ringing and someone answers;
- After you dial, you hear prolonged ringing (e.g., 10-20 times or more) before someone answers the phone - and that person says the phone only rang once or twice at his end before he picked it up.
- After you reach the person you are calling, the voice quality is unacceptable. For example, you are not calling on a wireless phone but only one person can hear the other, the sound is choppy, there are awkward transmission delays after speaking, or the speaker hears an echo. Perhaps you even try re-dialing but the unacceptable quality persists.
- You try to send a long distance fax but the fax machines consistently fail to interoperate once they have connected.

What information do I need to report these problems?

1. The date and time the call(s) were made or attempted;
2. The calling and called telephone numbers; and
3. If possible, the name of the telephone service provider that serves the calling customer.

How do I report these problems?

- If you live in a rural area:
 - Whenever possible, you should encourage the person trying to call you to report [details of the problem](#) to his telephone service provider. That provider should be best able to locate the source of the problem and fix it.
 - You should also provide the same information to your own local phone company so it may work with the caller's provider to isolate the problem.
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- If you are having trouble making long distance or wireless calls to a rural area:
 - Report [details of the problem](#) to your telephone service provider. That provider should be best able to locate the source of the problem and fix it.
- **You can also file a complaint with the FCC. For the FCC to take action on your complaint, you must provide the caller's number, the called number, and the date the attempted calls or problem calls were made. If possible, you should also identify the telephone service provider that serves the caller (i.e., the provider for the person calling the rural area) and provide the time of the calls. To file a complaint, complete this [online Form 2000B](#). http://transition.fcc.gov/eb/rcc/RCC_Form2000B.html**
- You can also [contact the FCC](#) by phone, fax, mail or email.

What is the cause of these problems?

The issue is complicated, but in a nutshell, the problem appears to be occurring in rural areas where long distance or wireless carriers normally pay higher-than-average charges to the local telephone company to complete calls. These charges are part of the decades-old system of "access charges" that help pay for the cost of rural networks. To minimize these charges, some long-distance carriers contract with third-party "least-cost routing" service providers connect calls to their destination at the lowest cost possible. Usually these contracts include strictly-defined performance parameters, but it appears that all too frequently those performance levels are not being met or, indeed, some calls are not even connecting at all.

What is being done to fix these problems?

The FCC has addressed concerns about call completion and call quality problems affecting long distance or wireless calls to rural telephone customers in a [Declaratory Ruling](#) issued on February 6, 2012. The Commission indicated that practices that lead to failure to complete and poor call quality problems may violate the Communications Act's prohibition on unjust and unreasonable practices or violate a carrier's obligations under the Act to refrain from unjust or unreasonable discrimination in practices, facilities, or services. In a reference to the use of least-cost routing services, the Commission also clarified that a carrier remains responsible for the provision of service to its customers even when it contracts with another service provider to carry the call to its destination.

In addition, new FCC rules in effect beginning December 29, 2011, will provide both short and long-term solutions to some rural call completion problems. These rules are part of the FCC's broader reforms of its access charge system, called intercarrier compensation, or ICC. The ICC Order gradually reduces intercarrier fees that are at the root of much of the problem. This reduction should largely eliminate the incentives for practices that appear to be undermining the reliability of rural service. Another new ICC rule bars carriers from altering the caller identification transmitted for a call, which is a common call quality complaint in rural areas.

The Declaratory Ruling and ICC reforms are just part of the FCC's strategy to fix the rural call completion problem. Other key actions in recent months included:

- A [Rural Call Completion Workshop](#) that, for the first time, brought together key stakeholders to discuss the problem and propose solutions.
- A [letter to the industry standards-setting body](#) inquiring about relevant industry practices, both existing and planned. In that letter and in follow-up meetings we've encouraged carriers to address business practices such as managing least cost routing providers, and technical matters such as excessive delays in call setup, false ringing on the caller's end, and calls that appear to loop between carriers but never complete.
- Ongoing investigations by the FCC's Enforcement Bureau looking at the underlying causes and industry practices behind these problems confronting rural subscribers, and assessing whether those practices violate any FCC regulations.

We recognize that there is still more to be done -- and we will be doing more. We share the concern about this problem and its impact on rural consumers and businesses, and are dedicated to ensuring that all Americans receive high-quality telephone services.

This information and more can also be found at:

<http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/problems-long-distance-or-wireless-calling-rural-areas>