

FCC works to combat long-distance issues for rural telephone customers

Written by Wauneta Breeze
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By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

The Nebraska Public Service Commission (NPSC) issued a press release last week stating it applauded the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for the steps it has taken to improve telephone service in rural parts of the country, including Nebraska.

The NPSC began investigating call completion problems reported by Nebraska telephone customers in 2011.

The press release stated the FCC and Level 3 Communications, Inc. entered into a consent decree where the company agreed to pay the federal government \$975,000 and to abide by call completion standards in the future.

“This action by the Enforcement Bureau represents a big first step in dealing with call failures experienced by Nebraskans,” First District Commissioner Frank Landis of Lincoln said. “More work is left to do, but this move by the FCC puts everyone on notice, poor service quality to customers is not going to be tolerated.”

The FCC stated the rural call completion problem, in general, can be attributed to long-distance carriers attempting to minimize the amount they pay to local telephone companies for completing long-distance calls. The FCC stated that many carriers utilize third-party, “least cost routers,” which attempt to connect calls at the lowest possible cost.

When asked to explain the phenomenon, BWTelcom General Manager, Randall Raile, said that

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long-distance carriers are, in essence, squeezing as many long-distance calls as possible through the fiber system.

Standard fiber T-1 lines are designed to support 24 conversations, which results in high call quality and completion rates.

However, Raile explained that some long-distance carriers are now using VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) in order to allow for more long-distance calls to be made at a time, sometimes as many as 96 calls per fiber line.

This results in poor call quality, clicking sounds and calls that do not complete, said Raile.

“The use of call routers has long been a part of the telecommunications industry,” Landis stated, “the problems arise when cost savings is prioritized over service.”

So, the question becomes, what can consumers do? Raile said the best thing customers can do is to make a log of when they experience call problems and let their phone company know about the problem.

He also said customers can call (700) 555-4141 to determine who their long-distance carrier is.

BWTELcom customers who have experienced issues are encouraged to call BWTELcom at (308) 394-2000 when they experience problems so Raile and the rest of the BWTELcom team can help them resolve any issues with their long-distance carrier.