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NEWS RELEASE

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OCC RELEASES LONG-DISTANCE RATE COMPARISON

The Office of Consumer Counsel has released a chart comparing state-to-state and in-state long-distance rates for residential consumers in Colorado. The rate chart includes calling card rates and various additional fees charged by some companies. Rates were compared among 15 long-distance carriers including major companies like AT&T, Qwest, Verizon/MCI and Sprint, as well as a number of smaller companies. The office publishes the rate comparison as part of its *OCC Consumer News*.

“Many of the smaller long-distance companies and certain prepaid cards continue to offer better rates than AT&T, Verizon/MCI, Qwest and Sprint. These lesser-known companies resell long-distance service using the networks of the major companies so the quality is the same, but the rates are usually cheaper,” said Jim Greenwood, the OCC’s Director.

Through analytical formulas applied to the rate comparison chart, the OCC came up with recommendations based on where calls are made and low, average and high call volumes.

<i>Low Usage</i> (30 minutes/month):	Everdial, Americom, ECG Long Distance
<i>Average Usage</i> (120 minutes/month):	TouchTone, Everdial, Total Call
<i>High Usage</i> (300 minutes/month):	Pioneer Telephone, TouchTone, Total Call
<i>State-to-State Calls Only:</i>	ECG and TouchTone
<i>In-State Calls Only:</i>	C-COM and Everdial

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“Enhanced Communication Group (ECG) had the best all-around deal for state-to-state calls at 2.5 cents per minute and no monthly fee or minimum with their residential plan,” said Greenwood. “However, if all of your calls are in-state, C-COM Affinity’s 5.5 cent plan with no monthly fee or minimum is generally the best plan. If you don’t mind dialing extra digits and the membership fee is not a problem, a 700-minute Verizon prepaid card is available at Costco for \$19.99 at a rate of less than 2.9 cents per minute, with no hidden fees or expiration date. Alternatively, there is always the wireless option with long-distance as part of the included minutes,” Greenwood said.

The OCC cautions that these rates are subject to change and consumers should call to confirm the rates offered before signing up with a particular company and plan. The rate comparison does not include all companies or all available calling plans of the companies included in the chart. There are dozens of long-distance resellers and many of them offer multiple calling plans.

In addition, the OCC notes that some companies charge additional fees and surcharges such as a Bill Statement Fee, Gross Receipts Tax, Property Tax Surcharge, In-State Connection Fee, Carrier Cost Recovery Charge or a monthly plan fee. All of these translate to higher long-distance rates. Furthermore, consumers should avoid the major companies’ “basic rates.”

“The ‘basic rates’ offered by the larger companies are about the highest rates offered and are often the default rates. This means that if you don’t specify a discount plan, your plan will default to the basic rate,” said Greenwood. “If you are paying the high basic rates of AT&T, Verizon/MCI or Sprint you are paying too much. Switch to your carrier’s discount plan or change carriers,” advised Greenwood.

To obtain a copy of the OCC’s long-distance rate comparison chart, Helpful Hints and additional consumer information in the *OCC Consumer News*, call, write or e-mail the office at: Office of Consumer Counsel, 1560 Broadway, Suite 200, Denver, CO 80202, (303) 894-2121, OCC@dora.state.co.us or obtain it from the OCC’s website at: www.dora.state.co.us/OCC/OCCNewsDecember2007.pdf.

Attachment: *OCC Consumer News*

The Office of Consumer Counsel represents residential, small business and agricultural consumers in electric, gas and telephone rate and rulemaking cases before the Public Utilities Commission and federal agencies. The OCC is a division of the Department of Regulatory Agencies.

