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NEWS RELEASE

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OCC RELEASES LONG-DISTANCE RATE COMPARISON

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

“The no-name resellers of long-distance service along with certain pre-paid cards continue to offer better rates than AT&T, Qwest, MCI, and Sprint. These smaller companies resell the major companies’ networks, so the quality is the same but the rates are usually cheaper,” said Dian Callaghan, OCC’s administrative director.

“To make comparison shopping easier, we did the research and came up with the companies offering the best rates based on call volumes and where calls are made. Here are our shopping tips,” Callaghan said.

Low Usage (30 minutes/month):
Average Usage (120 minutes/month):
High Usage (300 minutes/month):
State-to-State Calls Only:
In-State Calls Only:

Everdial, C-COM, Total Call International
Everdial, C-COM, Total Call International
Everdial, C-COM, MCI
ECG, Pioneer Telephone, Total Call International
Everdial, Telecom Affiliates, C-COM

“Everdial’s ‘Everdial 1’ plan is the best all-around deal at 4.9 cents per minute for state-to-state calls, 7.9 cents a minute in-state, and no monthly fee or minimum,” said Callaghan. “However, if all of your calls are state-to-state, ECG Long Distance, with its 3.5 cent or 3.9 cent per minute plans and no monthly fee or minimum, is the best choice. If you don’t mind dialing extra digits and the membership fee is not a problem, Sam’s Club’s AT&T prepaid card is only 3.47 cents per minute, no hidden fees and no expiration date. And, there is always the wireless option with long-distance as part of the included minutes,” Callaghan said.

The OCC cautions that these rates are subject to change and consumers should call to confirm the rates before signing up with a particular company and plan. Also, the rate comparison does not include all companies, nor are all calling plans of the companies included in the chart. There are hundreds of long-distance companies and many offer multiple calling plans.

The OCC also warns that some companies charge additional fees, such as MCI’s 1.4% Property Tax Surcharge or AT&T’s 99 cent per month Regulatory Assessment Fee, that mean higher long-distance rates. Also, consumers should avoid the major companies’ “basic rates.”

“The major companies’ basic rates are about the worst rates offered, and these rates are often their default rates. This means that if you don’t specify a discount plan, you’ll get the default rate,” said Callaghan. “If you are paying the high basic rates of AT&T, MCI, or Sprint -- as high as 35 cents a minute daytime, 30 cents evenings, and 19 cents weekends -- you are paying too much. Switch to your carrier’s discount plan or switch carriers,” advised Callaghan.

To obtain a copy of the OCC’s long-distance rate comparison chart, Helpful Hints, and additional consumer information in *OCC Consumer News*, call, write or e-mail the office at: Office of Consumer Counsel, 1580 Logan Street, Suite 740, Denver, CO 80203, (303) 894-2121, OCC@dora.state.co.us or obtain it from the OCC’s web site at: http://www.dora.state.co.us/occ/Consumer_News_062403.pdf

Attachments: Residential Long-Distance Rate Comparison Chart; *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.