

ENERGY & UTILITIES LAW ALERT

Connecticut DPUC to Implement New Area Codes in Connecticut

How This Change Can Affect Your Business Telephone System

Connecticut currently has two telephone area codes in the state. The “203” area code covers New Haven and Fairfield Counties while the “860” area code covers the remainder of the state. In addition, Connecticut has been assigned two additional area codes, “475” and “959.” The Connecticut Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC) has ordered that these new area codes will be implemented as “overlays” within the current “203” and “860” areas. Area codes “203” and “475” will be used in New Haven and Fairfield Counties while “860” and “959” will be used in all other counties. The new codes will be assigned to new telephone numbers that are assigned in each region.

The area code overlay was originally expected to take place in the fourth quarter of 1996, but as a result of technological advances with telephone number assignments and the lack of competitors within Connecticut, telephone numbers within the “203” and “860” areas did not exhaust as quickly as expected. This year, however, these area codes are expected finally to be exhausted by the second quarter, and the DPUC is now making plans to implement the overlay codes in the first quarter of 2010. Since the “203” area codes are expected to be completely assigned first, the DPUC is planning to begin with implementation of overlay within that area code but may order the overlay implemented in both regions simultaneously.

What Do the New Area Codes Mean for Your Business?

The new overlay codes can have a significant impact on your business and on your current telephone contact list. In order to implement the new area codes, you will be required to dial 10 digits for ALL calls. The DPUC is expected to implement a “permissive” dialing period for people to orient themselves to the new dialing requirement with mandatory 10-digit dialing to occur in the fourth quarter of 2009 or first quarter of 2010.

10-digit dialing means:

1. If your business has a PBX system that is older than three to four years, you may need to have the system reprogrammed to handle the new 10-digit dialing requirement.
2. Any contacts listed with only seven digits must be reviewed and updated to 10 digits so that a call can be made directly from the contact list.
3. Any seven-digit phone numbers embedded in applications such as call-center applications, CRM, predictive dialers,

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ACDs and “telephone screen pop applications” will need to be updated to 10-digit numbers.

4. All advertising that is done with seven digits must be updated to include the area code.

5. If your business is planning to add additional lines, which require additional telephone numbers, the lines should be added immediately to obtain an assigned number with the two existing area codes to avoid the assignment of a line with the new area code. Otherwise, your business telephone numbers may have different area codes.

According to Michael Feld, a principal at Layer-Eight, a business networking consulting firm,

“Telephony is often involved in applications that were once considered ‘data only.’ It is not uncommon for mid-sized businesses to employ telephone features in customer service applications and call centers as well as unified communications and ‘follow me’ services. Many of the devices that support these functions will be affected by the new 10-digit requirements. A complete review should be done to evaluate and assess the potential costs the new dialing rules may cause.”

Overall, you should be contacting your PBX and other voice-integrated application vendors to discuss the plans for the new area code.

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