

CHANGES IN TELEPHONE NUMBERING PLANS

Between 1940 and 1990, Pennsylvania had a total of only four area codes (412, 814, 717, and 215). Today, Pennsylvania has 10 active area codes (215, 610, 267, 484, 717, 570, 412, 724, 878, and 814), and two of these are now close to exhaustion.

The growth in wireless phones and fax machines since 1990 has led to the need to create plans for telephone numbers in both the 717 NPA (Numbering Plan Area or area code) and the 814 NPA.

It is the North American Numbering Plan Administrator NeuStar, Inc. (NANPA), in the role of a neutral third party, that works with the communication industry to propose plans for implementing new numbering plans. The NANPA allocates numbering resources, and monitors the availability of area codes to determine when the numbers in a certain area code are nearly exhausted. When an area code is nearing exhaustion, NANPA becomes the NPA Relief Planner, convenes meetings with the industry and, if a consensus is reached, files a plan with the Pennsylvania Utility Commission (PUC). To reach a consensus, substantial agreement (more than a majority of parties in the telephone industry) is necessary.

To assist in alleviating the number shortages, on January 27, 2010, the General Assembly of Pennsylvania passed a resolution supporting the PUC's petition to the Federal Communication for authority to begin mandatory number pooling to increase the number of NXX (telephone exchange) codes available in 570, 814, and 717 area codes. The resolution detailed concerns relating to the pending exhaustion of telephone numbers and suggested solutions to the concerns of implementing a new area code.

The Pennsylvania General Assembly stated that the PUC is best suited to make decisions on area code relief given its extensive and up-to-date information in the 570, 814, and 717 area codes. The resolution further stated that a possible pooling of numbers could result in the unnecessary implementation of additional area codes and urged the Federal Communications Commission to allow the PUC to implement mandatory number pooling.

The PUC has held hearings for the various NPAs with number shortages. For the 814 NPA, the hearings were held in February of 2010 at five locations throughout the geographic area covered by the 814 NPA. For the 717 NPA, the hearings were held throughout the region in March 2010.

Now Pennsylvanians in 717 and 814 NPA wait to learn which of the three methods could be deemed appropriate for them, unless number pooling can be a workable solution:

1. A geographic area code split, which occurs when the geographic area serviced by an area code is split into two or more geographical parts;
2. An area code boundary realignment, which occurs when the boundary lines between two adjacent area codes are shifted to allow the transfer of some numbers from one

- area code to the other;
3. An area code overlay, which occurs when a new area code is introduced to serve the same geographic area as an existing area code.

Please contact me at our office (717.657.7770) for assistance in understanding the impact of the various resolutions and rulings on this issue.

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