

Beware of Collect Calls from Payphones

Collect calls from a payphone can cost the recipient \$3 or more per minute, so avoid them when you can.

TURN has received a large number of complaints from consumers who were charged outrageous rates for collect calls from unsuspecting payphone users. Unfortunately, there is little recourse for consumers who are fleeced. The CPUC does not regulate rates, and the FCC will only investigate problems with interstate or international calls. Even in these instances, it is unclear as to whether the FCC will reverse the charges.

The best thing you can do to protect yourself is to ask the operator beforehand what the per-minute rate will be if you make a collect call. You may also be able to get a small credit by protesting to the company that handled the collect call after you receive the bill.

Let your friends and family know not to call you collect!

TURN tip: If your phone company offers a calling card, you may want to use it for emergency purposes if you don't have a cell phone, or if your cell phone is unreliable. **Pre-paid cards are not a good option because they have expiration dates, but calling cards do not expire.** Calling cards often do not have great rates, and there is a payphone surcharge every time you use it, but the cost is *significantly* lower than calling collect. Calling cards are also available at some retail stores. Of course, you'll have to find a payphone in order to use it. They are becoming increasingly rare, which means consumers cannot depend on finding one as easily as they used to. Another option is to charge the call to your home or work phone, but the operator will require verbal authorization from someone at the number you are charging your call to.