



Florida Public Service Commission

# Consumer Bulletin

Lila A. Jaber, Chairman



## Prepaid Calling Cards

You may have noticed at the checkout counter of your favorite discount store or supermarket one of the fastest growing products in the telecommunications industry – Prepaid Calling Cards. Prepaid Calling Cards can be purchased in many places – convenience stores, discount family stores, large retail chains, service stations and airports in denominations as low as \$5.00 to over \$100.00. Calling times for prepaid calling cards range from 30 minutes to several thousand minutes. Although they are normally called prepaid calling cards, they are also commonly known as, “prepaid phone cards,” “prepaid debit cards,” or “phone cards.”

Prepaid Calling Cards are easy to use. You simply dial the number printed on the card, enter your personal identification number (PIN), then you dial the number of the person you wish to call. Some prepaid calling cards provide phone prompts to inform you of how many minutes you have remaining and to notify you of a possible termination of the call due to lack of minutes.

In Florida, a company can't provide or sell prepaid calling cards without first obtaining a certificate from the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC monitors the prepaid phone card market very carefully to ensure that customers using prepaid calling cards in Florida receive quality service. For example, since June 2000, the PSC has opened a total of 56 investigations involving companies of prepaid calling cards for matters such as:

- ◆ providing prepaid calling card services without the approval of the PSC
- ◆ violation of PSC standards and rules
- ◆ incorrect billing of time and surcharges

As a result of these investigations, the following actions were taken by the PSC:

- ◆ issued fines of approximately \$167,000
- ◆ realized \$27,500 in settlement offers from prepaid calling card companies for inappropriate business behavior
- ◆ collected customer refunds for more than \$41,000
- ◆ cancelled three prepaid calling card certificates

The PSC will continue to protect the interest of consumers who use prepaid calling cards by working closely with these companies to ensure rules and regulations are followed. In addition, the staff of the PSC has worked with the companies that are certified to operate in Florida to ensure that tariffs were amended, errors were corrected on prepaid

calling cards and associated sales materials, and sales to unauthorized entities were stopped.

The PSC is available to assist you with any questions you may have concerning prepaid calling cards. For questions or concerns, please call us at **1-800-342-3552**. You may also e-mail us 24 hours a day, seven days a week at [contact@psc.state.fl.us](mailto:contact@psc.state.fl.us), or visit our Internet home page at <http://www.floridapsc.com>. You may use any of these forms of correspondence for obtaining our free brochure on prepaid calling cards.

### TIPS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING A PREPAID CALLING CARD

- 1** Find out the per-minute fee before purchasing a prepaid calling card. It is often cheaper to make brief calls using the card and dial direct for longer calls from your home.
- 2** Just like with any credit or debit card, make sure you keep your personal identification number (PIN) private.
- 3** Make sure you check the prepaid calling card's expiration date before you purchase it. Some cards expire even if there are unused minutes still available.
- 4** Always read the information on the card before purchasing. If you are a first time user of a prepaid calling card, consider making a small purchase. This will allow you to become acclimated with the service.
- 5** As with any other credit card, always treat your prepaid calling card as if it were cash.
- 6** Each prepaid calling card you purchase should have a toll-free customer service number on it should you have concerns regarding the use of the card. If, after speaking with a representative, the company fails to satisfy your concerns, please call the PSC.

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*Lila A. Jaber is the Chairman of the Florida Public Service Commission. The PSC sets the rates regulated utility companies charge for natural gas, electric and telephone service within the state. In 36 counties, it sets the price you pay for the water you drink, if your water company is privately owned. Chairman Jaber is also a member of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service and the state chair of the Federal-State Joint Conference on Advanced Telecommunications Services.*