

# 317: Changes are Coming

- The 317 area code serving Indianapolis and most of its suburbs is low on available numbers and projected to run out in 2017.
- Short-term solutions, implemented at the state level, have extended 317's life span by more than a decade beyond earlier projections.
- The long-term solution will require the introduction of a new area code.

The telephone area codes for Indiana and the rest of the United States faced few changes from 1947, when they were established, until the 1990s, when cellular phones, pagers, fax machines and other technological advances created a rapid growth in the need for new telephone numbers. During the past 2 decades, "number depletion" has required Indiana and 38 other states to add new area codes.

When created in the 1940s, the 317 area code served the northern two-thirds of Indiana. The 219 area code for northern Indiana was split off in 1954, leaving 317 to cover roughly the central third of the state. The only major change for 317 since then was in 1996, when number depletion required a new area code for central Indiana. Indianapolis and most of its suburbs kept 317 while the new 765 area code was implemented for the rest of the region. At the time, the industry's standard practice throughout North America was to add new area codes through geographic splits, with major cities keeping the original codes.



Industry forecasts in the following years predicted that the 317 area code would run out of numbers and need some form of long-term numbering relief by 2002. However, the state implemented number conservation efforts that have delayed that need substantially. While number conservation has delayed the need for changes, industry forecasts now show the 317 area exhausting its supply of numbers in the second quarter of 2017.

## What will happen to 317?

On July 10, 2014, the telecommunications industry formally asked the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC) to add a new area code to the 317 region. This request is pending as IURC Cause No. 44513.

The IURC will consider and determine when and how a new area code will be implemented for the 317 area. Consumers may offer written comments for the case record via the OUC's website. Comments can also be mailed, faxed or emailed to the OUC.

The OUC is expected to file its response to the industry's proposal on a future date to be determined. Information regarding filing and hearing dates will be posted on the OUC website when available. (The OUC's Guide to State Utility Regulatory Proceedings offers an overview of the steps involved in IURC cases.)

In its formal petition, the industry seeks an overlay for the entire 317 area.

## What's an "overlay?"

An "overlay" is a method of superimposing a new telephone area code to a region, allowing all existing customers to keep their current numbers. New telephone numbers in the area could either be assigned with the 317 code or with the new code. ***All new area codes introduced in the United States since 2008 have used the overlay method.***

With an overlay:

- All existing numbers in the 317 area would remain unchanged.
- All customers would dial ten digits for local calls (area code + number), though local calling areas would not change.
- Toll calls would still use eleven digits (1 + area code + number).
- Businesses, non-profit organizations, and other customers would not need to reprint signage, stationery, advertising or business cards because of the area code change.
- Consumers would not need to reprogram cell phones, fax machines, and other devices with new numbers, if the area codes are already programmed.

29 states have implemented area code overlays along with 10-digit dialing for local calls since the late 1990s, or are currently doing so. Southern Indiana's 812 area code is transitioning to 10-digit dialing with the new 930 area code to be introduced this fall.

All of Indiana's neighboring states have implemented overlays and 10-digit dialing for local calls to varying degrees. Four states have implemented overlays and 10-digit dialing statewide (Connecticut, Maryland, Oregon, and West Virginia).

### **Short-term relief**

Number conservation efforts can delay the need for a new area code by making more efficient use of existing numbers. Under the best example, numbers can be allocated to telecommunication companies in blocks of 1,000 rather than the traditional practice of 10,000 which often left many numbers unused.

Indiana received permission from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to use 1,000 block number pooling in 2001. Between 1,000 block number pooling and more efficient use of numbering supplies by telecommunications providers, the 317 area has been able to avoid major changes until now.

### **What stays the same?**

While an overlay requires consumers to use 10 digits instead of 7 for local calls, the following are **not** affected:

- 911, 811 and 211 calls
- Long distance telephone rates
- Local telephone rates
- Local (free) calling area boundaries

### **What's the timeframe?**

An IURC order in the pending case can be expected in 2015. The new area code would then be phased in over a 13-month period, starting when the Commission order is issued.

The standard timeframe for implementing a new area code by overlay includes:

- First, a 6-month period for customer education and network preparation.
- Then, a 6-month "grace period" allowing consumers to dial local numbers either with or without the area code.
- After the grace period, mandatory use of the new area codes would go into effect, including 10-digit dialing for local calls.
- One month after mandatory use begins, new numbers may be assigned with the new area code.



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