



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation
DEPARTMENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND CABLE
1000 Washington Street, Suite 820, Boston, MA 02118
(617) 305-3580
www.mass.gov/dtc

CHARLES D. BAKER
GOVERNOR

KARYN E. POLITO
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

MIKE KENNEALY
SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EDWARD A. PALLESCHI
UNDERSECRETARY

KAREN CHARLES PETERSON
COMMISSIONER

Consumer Advisory – 911 Surcharge

On June 29, 2018, the Department of Telecommunications and Cable (“DTC”) approved a petition filed by the State 911 Department to increase the monthly 911 surcharge from \$1.00 to \$1.50, effective January 1, 2019. The DTC also approved a reduction in the surcharge back to \$1.00, effective January 1, 2024. All telephone customers, regardless of technology (e.g. landline, wireless, or VoIP) pay the monthly surcharge for each line capable of accessing the 911 system. Below please find common questions and answers about the surcharge.

Q: When will the 911 surcharge on my bill increase?

A: The increased surcharge will become effective January 1, 2019. Any bills issued for service after this effective date can reflect the new surcharge of \$1.50.

Q: Who approved the increase to the surcharge?

A: The State 911 Department petitioned the DTC for the increase, and the DTC determined that the increased surcharge is necessary to cover the State 911 Department’s expenditures associated with replacing the statewide public safety radio system, called the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Interoperable Radio System or “CoMIRS.”

Q: Why is the increase in the surcharge necessary?

A: The increased surcharge is necessary to fund the construction and implementation of the new CoMIRS. CoMIRS will allow public safety personnel to communicate with each other and with public safety answering points across Massachusetts. This will ensure that the most appropriate assistance arrives to respond to emergencies as quickly as possible, no matter where an emergency happens in Massachusetts. Currently, different public safety teams rely on different radio systems in different parts of the state and these radio systems don’t, individually, reach every location in Massachusetts. In addition, many components of these existing systems are old and in need of replacement. The increased surcharge will fund the construction and rollout of the new CoMIRS system, which will allow Massachusetts public safety personnel to communicate about emergencies and call for and dispatch assistance to respond to emergencies quickly and reliably, increasing public safety. Finally, CoMIRS will allow both voice and data communications and will allow each radio’s location to be identified, which will both improve emergency response times and make public safety personnel safer.

Q: What are the benefits of the new CoMIRS system?

A: The CoMIRS system will replace separate, outdated public safety radio systems with limited reach with a new, unified, statewide system that is faster, more reliable, and safer for the public and for law enforcement.

Q: What notice about the increased surcharge was provided?

A: Notice of the State 911 Department's Petition to increase the surcharge was published in the *Boston Globe* on April 18, 2018, and on the DTC's website (www.mass.gov/dtc). The DTC received public comments on the Petition, and held a public hearing on the Petition on May 23, 2018. The Petition and Final Order approving the surcharge can be found on the DTC's website under Docket 18-2: <https://services.oca.state.ma.us/dtc/frmReleasedCalendar.aspx>.

Q: Why do I have to bear the cost of the new CoMIRS system?

A: CoMIRS will keep everyone in Massachusetts safer than they would be without this investment. With CoMIRS, public safety personnel will be better able to ensure that the most appropriate safety response arrives as quickly and as reliably as possible to address every emergency no matter where it occurs in Massachusetts.

Q: I have never dialed 911, why do I have to pay the surcharge?

A: The 911 system, whose response times and reliability will be improved when the CoMIRS system is complete, is in place as a contingency in the event it is ever needed. All telephone customers pay the monthly surcharge. The surcharge is required by law.

Q: When will CoMIRS be completed?

A: The State 911 Department and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security estimate that CoMIRS will be completed and operating by 2024.

For more information on staying connected to telephone service during emergencies, please see the DTC's website: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/stay-connected-during-emergencies>. If you need additional information or experience issues with your telephone service, please contact the DTC's Consumer Division at 1-800-392-6066, or by email, at consumer.complaints@mass.gov.

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