

**GEORGIA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

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**GROWING PAINS CAUSE NEW AREA CODE IN SOUTH GEORGIA**

ATLANTA -- Two new area codes have been added to the Atlanta area in the past three years to accommodate the growing economy. Now it's South Georgia's turn. The telecommunications industry is expected to notify the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) in June that a new code will be needed in the 912 area by December of 1999. Representatives from the industry were in Macon Wednesday to hammer out a recommendation they would like the PSC to follow to implement the new code.

Lockheed Martin, the new code administrator for the United States, says requests for additional lines for fax machines, Internet access, pagers, cellular phones and reservations for numbers for local phone competition are expected to deplete available phone numbers in the 912 area by December of 1999. In order to bring about a smooth transition, the PSC will have to choose between two relief plans by the end of this year. One plan under consideration would require ten-digit dialing while another would require changing over 500,000 telephone numbers (land lines).

The more traditional relief plan involves a geographic split where an identifiable natural or physical boundary, such as I-75, is used to split the current 912 area to make room for a second code. Under this option the boundary line runs just east of I-75 keeping communities of interest intact such as Macon and Warner Robins. The geographic split option, while the most easily understood by customers, would require that over 500,000 phone numbers be reassigned to the new code. Seven-digit dialing within the same area code would still be permissible under this option. If the PSC chooses this option, it won't be known until December exactly which side of I-75 would receive the new code.

"The consensus reached by the industry Wednesday is that the PSC should implement a number overlay plan for South Georgia," said Stan Washer, a relief planner with Lockheed Martin. Number overlay, as opposed to a geographic split, would not require any phone number changes. Instead, as new numbers come on-line, they are assigned the new code regardless of the location of the residence or business. The downside to a number overlay plan is that ten-digit dialing would be required. Regardless of the plan chosen, toll-free dialing will not be affected.

Responding to the Industry recommendation the PSC would only say: "It's going to be a hard sell to convince South Georgians of the necessity of dialing ten digits to call a neighbor or family member down the street," said Shawn Davis, spokesman for the PSC.

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