



# Cable and Satellite TV Subscriber Rights

Signing up for cable or satellite TV service can be confusing – you should know your rights as a subscriber.

In Wisconsin, you have certain rights as a cable television subscriber. Wis. Stat. s. 100.209 provides that:

- You cannot be billed for a service that you have not affirmatively ordered or agreed to.
- The terms of a subscription must be disclosed and may not be misrepresented.
- A cable or satellite dish provider may not automatically renew your subscription without notice unless you are free to cancel at any time without penalty.

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*Call the provider immediately to report a service interruption.*

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- Except in cases beyond the control of the cable operator, you are entitled to 30 days advance written notice before a program service is deleted or a rate increase is put into effect.
- Your service cannot be disconnected unless you have been given at least a 10-day advance written notice of the disconnection. No advance notice needs to be given if the disconnection is to prevent signal leakage or cable theft.
- A provider may not charge for disconnection or charge other fees unless they are disclosed in writing at the time you subscribe.
- In case of a service interruption that does not involve a natural disaster, you are entitled to have your service restored within 72 hours after you report the interruption or request repair.

## Subscription changes

A provider may not make any subscription changes, such as a price increase or change in channel offerings, without providing you a written notice at least 25 days but not more than 90 days in advance. The written



notice must state that you may cancel any service offering affected by the change without incurring a cancellation charge or disconnection fee. To cancel your service, you should inform your service provider both orally and in writing.

## Service interruptions

- Call the provider immediately to report a service interruption. Find out who is responsible to pay for the service call if necessary.
- Make a note of the date and time you placed the call and the name of the person to whom you spoke to.
- You may be entitled to a full day credit on your bill for any service interruption caused by your cable operator which lasts more than four hours in one day. If the interruption is not caused by the cable operator, you are entitled to a credit for each hour service is interrupted if the interruption is longer than four hours. You are not entitled to these credits unless you notify the cable operator of the interruption and request a credit.

## Rate increase and program service deletion

You must receive a 30-day notice before a rate increase is put into effect or a program service is deleted. The

Federal Cable Act also gives the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the right to establish standards and rules for basic service rates and for unreasonable rates in non-basic services.

## Billing disputes

If you receive your bill and find unauthorized charges for services you never agreed to, including pay per view (PPV) movies, contact your satellite provider in writing immediately to dispute the charges. To prevent unauthorized charges, guard your passwords carefully. Also ask your provider if they are able to block all or certain types of charges in the future.

## Record keeping

Keep copies of all correspondence and notes of phone calls, advertisements or other promotional materials, any agreements or contracts, bills, the terms and conditions, and disconnection notices given to you by your subscription provider.

## Bundling services

Cable and satellite providers sometimes partner with telephone companies to create bundles which include TV, Internet, and phone services. While bundling services can provide convenience and savings, it can also make it more difficult to get service when something goes wrong. When it comes to customer service issues and resolving problems, the fact that different services are administered by different companies can make it easy to pass the buck.

When bundling – be sure to find out who is carrying each service, what their rates are, and any contract requirements.

## Rentals, condominiums, cooperatives, townhomes, and manufactured homes

An owner or tenant has the right to subscribe to cable or install a satellite dish or an individually owned antenna in “exclusive use areas.” “Exclusive use” refers to areas of the property only the renter may enter and use, such as terraces, balconies or patios. If the area is shared with others or accessible without the renter’s permission, it is not “exclusive use.”

Under certain conditions, if a common service is available for use by residents, then a private installation may be prohibited if the signal quality is equal to a

privately-owned antenna or a satellite dish and the cost is no greater. Restrictions are permitted to prevent damage to leased property or if there are safety concerns.

## Reception of local TV stations

The FCC also permits satellite television services to offer local station programming in a Designated Market Area (DMA) determined by Nielsen Media Research. Satellite TV companies are not required to provide local service, but if they do they must provide all the stations in the local DMA. Check with your satellite TV company to determine your DMA, whether the company offers local programming, and what stations are included.

*For further information on FCC regulations, contact:*

Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington DC 20554  
Toll-free: 1-888-225-5322  
Fax: 1-866-418-0232  
Website: [www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov)  
E-mail: [fccinfo@fcc.gov](mailto:fccinfo@fcc.gov)

*For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact:*

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,  
Trade and Consumer Protection  
*Bureau of Consumer Protection*  
2811 Agriculture Drive, PO Box 8911  
Madison, WI 53708-8911  
Email: [DATCPHotline@wi.gov](mailto:DATCPHotline@wi.gov)  
Website: [datcp.wi.gov](http://datcp.wi.gov)  
(800) 422-7128      TTY: (608) 224-5058

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