

812: Changes are Coming

- The 812 area code in southern and south-central Indiana is low on available numbers and projected to run out in 2015.
- Short-term solutions, implemented at the state level, have extended 812's life span by nearly a decade longer than expected.
- 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 35 other states to add new area codes. While 2 of Indiana’s original 3 area codes (219 and 317) have needed changes, short-term number conservation efforts have postponed the need for changes to the 812 area code.

Industry forecasts in the early 2000s predicted that the 812 area code would run out of numbers and need some form of long-term numbering relief by 2004. 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 812 area exhausting its supply of numbers in the second quarter of 2015.

What will happen to 812?

On August 3, 2012, the telecommunications industry formally asked the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC) to add a new area code to the 812 area. This request is pending as IURC Cause No. 44233.

The IURC will consider and determine when and how a new area code will be implemented for the 812 area. Consumers may offer written comments for the case record via the OUCC’s Website. Comments can also be mailed, faxed or emailed to the OUCC.

The OUCC is expected to file its response to the industry’s proposal on a future date to be determined. Public hearings are also anticipated. Dates, times and locations will be posted on the OUCC Website when available. (The OUCC’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 812 area.

What’s an “overlay?”

An “overlay” is a method of adding a new telephone area code to a region that allows all existing customers to keep their current numbers. New telephone numbers in the area could either be assigned with the 812 code or with the new code.

If an Overlay is used:

- All existing numbers in the 812 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, etc. with new numbers.

Since the late 1990s, 21 states have implemented area code overlays. They include 3 of Indiana’s neighboring states (Illinois, Michigan and Ohio) and 3 states that have implemented overlays statewide (Maryland, Oregon and West Virginia).

43 new area codes have been introduced in North America since 2005. All but 2 have been implemented as overlays.

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Are there other solutions?

Long term

Before 2005, most new area codes were implemented using a geographic split. An existing area code would be divided into 2 or more regions, with 1 region keeping the same area code and the other(s) getting new codes. This method was used in central and northern Indiana in 1996 (for the 317 area code) and 2001 (for the 219 area code).

Under a geographic split:

- Some customers would keep their current numbers, while others would have to change to the new area code.
- Seven-digit dialing, as currently used for local calls, would continue.
- Businesses, non-profit organizations, and other customers in the area(s) assigned the new code(s) would incur additional costs from reprinting signage, stationery, etc. due to the area code change.
- Consumers would need to reprogram cell phones and fax machines to include the new number.

Short term

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, after the 219 and 317 area codes in northern and central Indiana exhausted their numbering supplies and had to have new area codes assigned.

1,000 block number pooling has helped significantly extend the life spans of all Indiana area codes since 2001, including delaying any need for 812's long term relief until now.

What stays the same?

Regardless of how a new area code is implemented, these things 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 2013. 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 includes:

- First, a 6-month period for customer education and network preparation.
- Then, a 6-month "grace period."
 - If the new code is an overlay, consumers can dial local numbers with or without the area code.
 - If the new code is a geographic split, consumers can reach numbers with either the "old" or "new" area codes.
- After the grace period, mandatory use of the new area codes would go into effect (including 10-digit dialing for local calls if an overlay is used).
- One month after mandatory use begins, new numbers may be assigned with the new area code.

