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**CABLE COMPANIES PUT CUSTOMERS' SAFETY AT RISK
BY ELIMINATING FREE BACKUP BATTERIES IN PHONE EQUIPMENT**

(BOSTON) – A new ploy by cable companies to add yet another fee to customers' bills may adversely impact public safety as well.

Customers with digital telephone service who reach for their landline phone in an emergency may soon discover they can't get a dial tone. That could happen as some cable companies have stopped providing free backup batteries for telephone modems, thus making even corded phones connected to them inoperative during a power failure.

In late February, for example, Comcast changed its policy to no longer automatically equip telephone modems with a backup battery, and is now charging \$35 (plus shipping in some cases) for them and for replacements of old, dead ones. Previously, both original and replacement batteries were free. Consumer advocates worry that customers will erroneously assume they have a backup battery, and that thrifty or inattentive users will now skip checking or changing their backup battery and thus be at risk in an emergency.

"Cable companies have found yet another way to stick it to customers, but this time it could have serious safety implications," explained Edgar Dworsky, founder of ConsumerWorld.org. "In a blackout, for example, not having a functioning backup battery in the customer's modem would mean no calls could be made including to 911."

Digital telephone service provided by cable companies typically requires customers to rent a telephone modem or an EMTA (a combination cable modem and telephone adapter) to which their telephones are connected for up to \$7 a month. Sometimes the rental price of the modem is embedded in the monthly service fee. But either way, unlike corded telephones connected to conventional landlines which usually operate during a power outage, phones attached to a digital line will not work unless a backup battery has been installed in the modem. Backup batteries typically provide anywhere from four to eight hours of service, and last three to five years.

"These battery policies in many cases are outrageous," said Dworsky. "It seems to me if the customer is renting the phone equipment, the company should be responsible for making it fully functional and fixing any parts that fail, including that pricey battery."

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which regulates telephone service including 911, said in a statement that while it does not require backup batteries, the agency is concerned about the impact of power outages on telephone service and “encourages consumers to take this into consideration when choosing a service provider.”

In late April, Consumer World conducted a survey of leading cable companies’ policies of providing initial backup batteries and replacing dead ones. The results spanned the gamut from not providing any backup batteries, to one company, RCN, providing all batteries free and even sending out a technician at no charge to replace old ones.

CABLE COMPANY BACKUP BATTERY POLICIES

Company	Original Battery	Replacement Battery
AT&T U-verse	Free	\$37.95+ from manufacturer, free only with triple play
Cablevision/Optimum	Not provided, \$29.95 if wanted	\$29.95+ from mfr. or company store
Charter	\$40 at time of installation	Free
Comcast Xfinity	Not provided, \$35 if wanted	\$35 plus \$5.95 shipping
Cox	Free	Free, installation extra
RCN	Free	Free, and free installation
Time Warner Cable	Not provided, \$35+ from mfr.	\$35+ from mfr.
Verizon FIOS	Free	\$34.95 + \$8.99 shipping

Information obtained from companies’ websites and company responses to specific inquiries. Prices may vary.

When asked, the cable companies typically defended charging for backup batteries by saying that most customers have cell phones they can use in an emergency, and that replacing regular maintenance items like batteries in a product is traditionally done by the customer.

Dworsky urged all the cable companies that charge for backup batteries to reconsider their policies, and to provide these potentially lifesaving devices free at least to all customers who request them. He also advised consumers that they should:

- equip their telephone modems with backup batteries unless they have a reliable alternative means of making emergency calls,
- check the battery status regularly, and
- to save money, purchase backup batteries online from third-party vendors which sometimes sell them for the half the price charged by the cable companies and their manufacturers.

Disclosure: Edgar Dworsky is a member of Verizon’s Consumer Advisory Board. The contents of this press release are completely independent of his role on that board.

Consumer World®, launched in 1995, is a Boston-based, public service consumer resource guide with over 2000 links to everything "consumer" on the Internet. **Edgar Dworsky**, the founder and editor of ConsumerWorld.org and MousePrint.org, is a consumer advocate and former Assistant Attorney General in the Consumer Protection and Anti-trust Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office.

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