

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ICC ANNOUNCES OVERLAY PLAN FOR 217 REGION

New Area Code 447 to be Introduced as Supply of 217 Prefixes Dwindles

The Illinois Commerce Commission has announced that a new “overlay” area code will be implemented to supplement the telephone number supply in Illinois’ 217 area code. The new code will be 447.

The 217 area code region extends across Central Illinois. It runs from the Missouri and Iowa state lines on the west, to the Indiana border on the east. Champaign-Urbana, Charleston, Danville, Decatur, Effingham, Jacksonville, Lincoln, Quincy and Springfield are among the larger cities served by the 217 area code. The 217 was one of the original 86 area codes established by the Bell System in 1951. It was last modified in 1957, when a portion of it was combined with part of the 815 area code to form the 309 area code.

History of the New Overlay

NeuStar, Inc., under contract by the Federal Communications Commission to administer the nation’s telephone numbering resources, originally filed a petition (on behalf of the Illinois telecommunications industry) with the Commerce Commission seeking a new area code for 217 in October, 2001. At that time, it forecast that 217 would exhaust its supply of available prefixes during the second quarter of 2004.

Conservation efforts put in place, such as number pooling and code rationing continue to forestall the need for the new area code.

The Commission held public hearings seeking public comment on the matter during the spring of 2004, and subsequently approved the overlay relief plan on August 16, 2006.

The telecom industry will convene on September 12 to determine parameters and details of the 447 implementation. Commission Staff will continue to work with the industry to conserve numbering resources, and forestall the implementation of the new area code as long as possible.

Upon implementation of the 447 area code, current customers will keep their numbers as well as the 217 area code. The new area code is being introduced so that the numbering administrator will have a continuing supply of prefixes and blocks to assign to new and growing telecommunications service providers. This does not mean that individual 217 telephone numbers are no longer available in the companies’ existing inventories. Consumers seeking additional telephone lines will, in most cases, continue to be able to receive 217 telephone numbers, even after the 447 area code is placed in service.

How an Overlay Area Code Works

With an overlay, a second area code is added to the same geographic area as the existing area code, with all current phone customers retaining the original area code. New telephone customers for local phone service, cellular and paging services, and alarms, for example, assigned in the same area may receive telephone numbers in the new overlay area code.

The FCC requires that all telephone calls made in the overlay area be completed by dialing the full, 10-digit number (area code + seven digit number) . This includes calls currently dialed with seven digits in the existing area code. This requirement does not affect the cost of the call. A local call will remain a local call, and a toll call will remain a toll call, regardless of the number of digits that are dialed to complete it.

Area code overlays are already in place in 16 states, including Illinois. (847/224 and 815/779)

Prior to the assignment of numbers in the new area code, customers in the 217 area code will have a period of time to adjust to dialing the additional digits to complete their calls, prior to it becoming mandatory. Once mandatory full-number dialing is in place, the first 447 prefixes may be placed into service. Under current exhaust projections, this will likely occur sometime during 2009.

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