
IMPORTANT NOTICE ABOUT CHANGES IN
ROAMING COVERAGE STARTING
JANUARY 3, 2023
THAT COULD IMPACT YOUR SERVICE
Originally Published by Individual Letter on December 23, 2022

To: ALL PINE BELT WIRELESS - MOBILE PHONE CUSTOMERS

Date: January 2, 2023

Pine Belt Wireless mobile phones use CDMA technology for regular voice calls, text messaging, and picture messaging. CDMA has been a leading standard since 1999 but is being replaced by next generation technology known as Voice over LTE or VoLTE (pronounced “vole-tee”).

On **January 3, 2023**, Verizon Wireless will shut off its CDMA network in favor of 100% VoLTE based services. Other national carriers sunset their CDMA services earlier this year. Once Verizon completes its transition, the national carriers will only support VoLTE for voice, texting, and picture messaging.

Pine Belt Wireless maintains network partnership arrangements with Verizon and other carriers so that our local customers will be able to use their phones while traveling outside the home area. Likewise, we have been working diligently since late 2021 with the goal of doing the same - transitioning our voice, text messaging, and picture messaging services to VoLTE. Major vendors involved in our transition efforts are Nokia, Hewlett Packard Enterprises, and Microsoft.

Regrettably, however, we have not been able to overcome a number of factors beyond our control and as a result we will not have our VoLTE network ready by the time of Verizon’s CDMA sunset date. We are continuing to work on our transition, however, and we expect that work to be complete soon in the month of January 2023, at which point we will also fully support VoLTE voice, texting, and picture messaging. Additional details regarding some of the challenges of our upgrade project are provided on page 3.

What does this mean to Pine Belt Wireless Mobile Phone Customers? Starting on January 3, 2023 and continuing until we complete our equipment upgrades, Pine Belt customers will only be able to use CDMA based mobile phone for voice calls, text messaging, and picture messaging on the Pine Belt Wireless network. In other words, customers will not be able to use their mobile phone for these functions while roaming outside the Pine Belt Wireless coverage footprint. On network calling, will continue to work the same, including and receiving calls from anywhere.

Also, ***LTE data services will continue to work at home and while roaming as per normal*** while we continue to work on our upgrade to VoLTE. In other words, if you subscribe to our LTE data service you will be able to continue to use your phone for all internet-based services while we complete our upgrades. Included with the LTE data services would be the ability to also use the various “Over The Top” voice calling and messaging applications such as WhatsApp® and Google Meets® as well as all many internet based access services.

Please know that we truly appreciate that you have chosen Pine Belt as your cell phone provider. That said, also please know that we deeply regret we were unable to complete our core upgrade project in advance of the last national carrier sunset date and the uncertainties and potential disruptions this situation will cause. We commit 100% to work with you in whatever way possible to mitigate the impact caused by this situation.

Please call us at 1-888-810-4638 if you have any questions or need to discuss this further with a customer service representative.

Sincerely,



John C. Nettles, President
Pine Belt Wireless

Pine Belt Wireless CDMA Shutdown and Rip and Replace Background Information

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Background: Pine Belt Wireless' current wireless voice and data network was upgraded, including the addition of 4G-LTE data services, during 2014 thru 2017 using Federal Communications Commission funds made available under an Obama Administration program known as Mobility Fund Phase I. The purpose of this program was to extend and improve 2G and 3G mobile voice and data services in rural areas across the country that were unserved and underserved with such technology at that time. The program involved a competitive bidding scenario for the funds by the companies interested in participating. A basic premise of the program was that "winning" operators would be required to improve and extend coverage as widely as possible in the targeted areas using the least amount of funds possible.

Pine Belt was fortunate to qualify for a tranche of these funds with which we were able to refit and upgrade our network of 50 towers as it existed at the time and to also add 17 new towers to significantly expand our coverage footprint. In doing this, we solicited project proposals from 5 different US approved vendors and selected the one that offered to deliver the equipment and services at the lowest price. ZTE, a then US approved Chinese equipment manufacturer, submitted the best bid and was awarded the contract.

Then, in 2018, during the first year of the next presidential administration, other federal actions were taken which effectively outlawed the use of the equipment that we had just purchased and installed. That kicked off a long and drawn-out process often referred to as "rip and replace" which, among other things, has triggered a sequence of costly events that have prevented us from making any substantial improvements since then. Additionally, under "rip and replace" we are required by law to ultimately decommission and destroy all the previously mentioned equipment purchased from ZTE. On the flip side, however, and a shining light on the horizon, is the fortunate reality that by way of "rip and replace" additional federal funds are also being made available to install replacement equipment from a narrowed field of US approved vendors. But, the major downside to that part is those funds were not released to us until late July 2022.

As such, it was not until just a few months ago that we were actually in position to start the work required to install the replacement equipment. In the meantime, the industry and technology evolution has continued with the larger and better capitalized operators having the freedom to drive their business plans and investment decisions in whatever direction they see fit consistent with their strategic goals and objectives. That said, the most immediate and most significant issue impacting us and our customers at this point is Verizon's announced shut down of its 2G and 3G CDMA based wireless network services across the United States which will happen on January 3, 2023.

Why is Verizon's CDMA shutdown an issue for Pine Belt Wireless cell phone users? Most people use their cell phone most of the time in the general proximity of their home and office. In other words, a home network suits the needs of most users most of the time. In fact, a recent study of usage on our network shows that a little over 50% of our customers made no more than 6 roaming telephone calls in the past 12 months. However, when traveling, even as infrequently as some do, once Verizon stops providing CDMA services, none of our customers will be able to make a roaming call until such time that we complete installation of the new equipment and our customers are equipped with a mobile phone compatible with VoLTE (for Voice over LTE).

What does this mean for Pine Belt Wireless Mobile Phone Customers? On January 3, 2023, the CDMA based voice and related services on your Pine Belt Wireless mobile phone will continue to work while attached to the Pine Belt Wireless home network. However, you will only be able to use your Pine Belt Wireless cell phone for LTE data services while traveling outside the Pine Belt Wireless coverage. Put another way, you will not be able to make standard voice calls or send text or picture messages while roaming until such time that our new equipment installation is complete and your cell phone is exchanged for a VoLTE compatible unit or, if possible, upgraded.