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New York State
Public Service Commission

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Area Code Questions & Answers

The 315 area code in New York State will run out of telephone numbers by the end of 2010, according to the Federal Communications Commission. The New York State Public Service Commission (PSC) has instituted a proceeding to evaluate the options for providing additional numbers to the region. The PSC has prepared this set of questions and answers about the proceeding to help people learn about area codes and the implementation of a new area code in Northern and Central New York.

Background Information on Area Codes

Q. What is the purpose of area codes?

A. Three-digit area codes were developed in 1947 to provide a uniform numbering system to permit people to make long distance calls without going through an operator. The North American Numbering Plan (NANPA) is one of the international dialing plans which allow point-to-point direct dialing between any two users in the world without operator assistance.

Q. Until 1985, there were seven area codes in New York State. Now there are 14. Why are there so many new area codes?

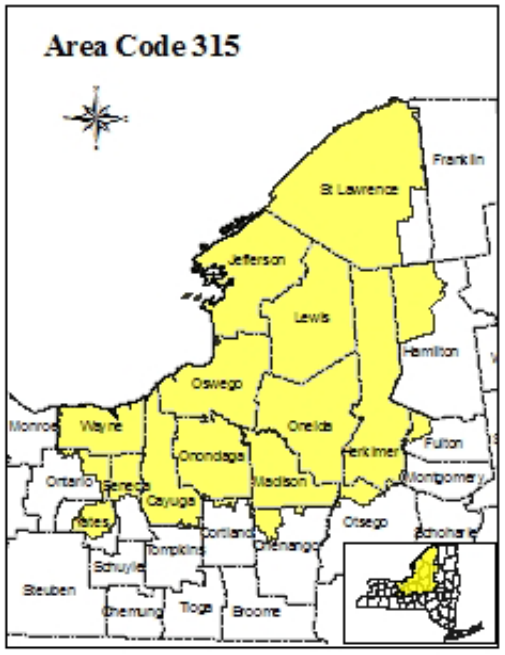
A. To accommodate the need for more telephone numbers in those regions, new area codes were implemented on an as-needed basis.

Q. Why do area codes run out of telephone numbers?

A. There is a limit to the number of telephone numbers available within an area code. With increased telephone competition and the tremendous increase in the use of cell phones, second lines, fax machines, and pagers, the need for new telephone numbers has accelerated in many areas in the State.

Q. How are telephone numbers assigned?

A. A telephone company, also known as a carrier, requests numbers from an independent number administrator for use in distinct geographic locations within the area code, known as rate centers, to provide service to customers residing within those areas. Originally, numbers were assigned in blocks of 10,000; however, in 2000, to conserve telephone numbers, the PSC adopted rules to make number assignment more efficient. As a result, numbers are assigned to carriers in blocks of 1,000. In addition, companies who have unused numbers are required to return a portion of them to a pool for assignment, as needed, to other companies. Also, telephone companies must have assigned a certain percentage of existing numbers before being given new ones.



The 315 area code serves all or part of eighteen counties in the northern and central region of New York State, including:

Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Fulton, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Ontario, Oswego, Otsego, Seneca, St. Lawrence, Wayne and Yates

Q. How does the PSC know when a new area code is needed?

A. NANPA, at the behest of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), lets the PSC know when a particular area code is running out of numbers.

Q. What is the PSC's role?

A. After receiving recommendations from the telecommunications industry and from the Staff of the Department of Public Service about implementation of a new area code, the PSC conducts an extensive review in which all interested residents, businesses and local organizations have the opportunity to comment on the options for introducing a new area code. The PSC subsequently determines the best way to introduce a new area code to a region with the least possible disruption to customers.

Area Code Options

Q. What options are available to the PSC to introduce a new area code?

A. There are two basic options available: an overlay and a geographic split.

Q. What is an overlay? What are advantages and disadvantages of an overlay?

A. An overlay is when a new area code is superimposed on the existing region with the result that two different area codes would serve the same region.

Advantages: All existing customers will be able to retain their telephone number (i.e., area code and seven digit telephone number). Implementation of an overlay code also spares existing wireless telephone customers from having to reprogram their cellular phones and pagers with a new area code.

Disadvantages: The FCC mandates 10-digit dialing (1+3-digit area code + 7-digit number) for *all* calls within the same area code boundary. With an overlay, calls will not be completed without the area code. This might cause confusion because area codes would always have to be dialed, even for calls with the same area code in the same building.

Q. What is a geographic split? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a geographic split?

A. A geographic split is the division of an existing area code region into two, with one region keeping the old area code and the other region being assigned a new area code.

Advantages: The geographic split keeps the familiar identification between a locale and its area code, thereby avoiding the confusion of having more than one area code serving the same region. Callers would continue to dial seven digits within their area code. Also, existing wireless customers located in either region might be able to keep their existing area code.

Disadvantages: All customers in the newly created region are required to adopt the new area code; however, a customer's seven-digit telephone number will not change. Wireless customers located in the region with the new area code will be required to have their cellular phones and pagers reprogrammed.

Q. Who assigns the new area code?

A. The NANPA assigns the new area code number.

Q. If a geographic split is used, who determines which region keeps the current area code?

A. The PSC, after receiving public comment, decides which region should keep the current area code.

315 PSC Area Code Proceeding

Q. According to PSC Staff's White Paper, there are 5.3 million numbers that are not being used in the 315 area code region. How can it be that the 315 area code is running out of telephone numbers?

A. In accordance with the NANPA, area codes are subdivided into distinct geographic regions known as rate centers. Blocks of numbers are assigned to individual rate centers. Numbers assigned to those rate centers cannot be used in any other rate center within the area code. In low-usage rate centers, some numbers will never be used. When this happens in multiple rate centers, as it has in the 315 area code, the utilization of actual numbers can be low for the entire area code. However, the 315 region has high use rate centers that are in jeopardy of running out of numbers.

Q. Have new area codes been implemented in other parts of New York State?

A. Yes. Beginning in 1984, a new area code was introduced in New York City and in 1999, two additional area codes were implemented in this region. Over the past several years, new area codes have been implemented in the Long Island, Westchester, Buffalo and Rochester regions. Nationally, 191new area codes have been implemented across the country.

Q. Wouldn't it be easier to assign the new area code to newer technology, like cellular phones, faxes and pagers?

A. Such action is not permitted by the FCC. The FCC has directed that an area code cannot be technology or service-specific since that would be anti-competitive and wouldn't provide effective area code relief. In other words, area codes cannot be assigned exclusively to wireless technologies, such as cellular phones and pagers, or solely to business or residential customers.

Q. How can the public comment on the options for the PSC to consider in providing area code relief in the 345 region?

A. The PSC will hold public statement hearings concerning the options for area code relief in the 315 region (see option map and hearing schedule below). Each hearing will be preceding an information session at which PSC Staff will describe the area code relief options and respond to questions. Also, comments from the public may be directed to the PSC's toll-free Opinion Line at 1-800-335-2120 and pressing "1" to leave a comment or via the Internet at www.AskPSC.com and completing a PSC Comment Form found under "Contact Us."

Q. What happens after the PSC makes a decision regarding a new area code in the 315 region?

A. The NANPA reviews the plan and, if it is in accord with industry guidelines, the NANPA will assign the new area code from the remaining supply. The PSC will then direct the local telephone companies in the existing region to conduct an educational campaign for customers about the new area code.

Q. How will the new area code be introduced?

A. Whether it's an overlay or a geographic split, a new area code is introduced in phases. A permissive dialing period, allowing people time to get used to the new way to dial, is established. During this phase, callers can dial a telephone number in the new area code by using either the new or the old area code. Callers dialing the old, incorrect, area code will hear a recorded announcement reminding them of the correct area code, and the call will be completed. The permissive dialing phase generally lasts from six to nine months.

The mandatory dialing phase follows the permissive dialing phase. Callers must use the new area code to dial into that region. For the first six to nine months of that phase, if callers do not use the new area code, they will hear a recorded announcement informing them that they must dial again, using the new area code.

Q. If my region is split and I am in the region which will receive the new area code, do I have to change my entire telephone number?

A. No. The area code would be the only part of your telephone number that would change.

Q. If an overlay is used and I want to add a telephone line in my home or business, is it possible to get one with my current area code?

A. It depends. All new service connections are generally assigned a number from the new area code, but if phone numbers are still available from your current area code, you could be assigned a number from that area code. However, if numbers within the existing area code are depleted, you will receive a number from the new area code. This means that you could have different area codes within the same household or business.

Q. Should I tell people my area code when I give them my telephone number?

A. Yes. People should think of their telephone number in terms of ten digits – the area code plus the seven-digit phone number. Remember, your seven-digit number exists in other area codes.

Q. Will calls to 911 change?

A. No. All 911 emergency calls will be connected from any area code.

Q. Will the cost of calls from one area code to the new area code change?

A. No. The cost of a call will not change with the introduction of a new area code. Calls considered local before a new area code is introduced will continue to be local calls whether a geographic split or an overlay code is implemented.

Q. Will I have to change my phone number if I switch my service to another local telephone company?

A. No. You should be able to keep your phone number if you switch telephone companies. Ask the company that you are considering for verification and further details.

For More Information About Area Codes in New York State

Q. How do I find about the area codes in New York State?

A. A map with all the area codes in New York State can be found under the Telecommunications section of our web sites, www.AskPSC.com and www.dps.state.ny.us. Your local telephone directory has area code information as well.

Q. Will Directory Assistance have information on the new area codes?

A. Yes. Directory Assistance services will be able to provide the new area codes. The Internet and directory assistance companies should also be able to provide the new area codes.

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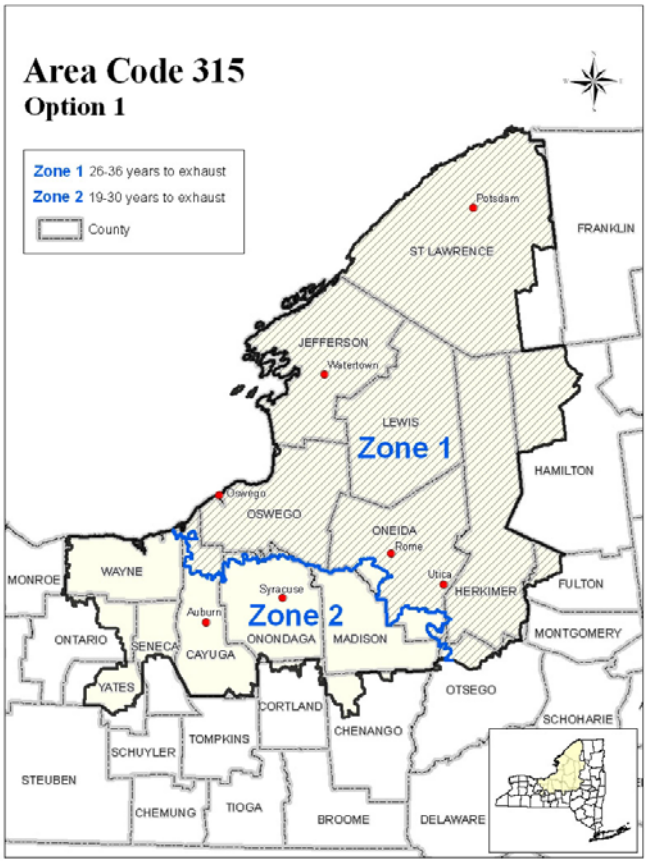
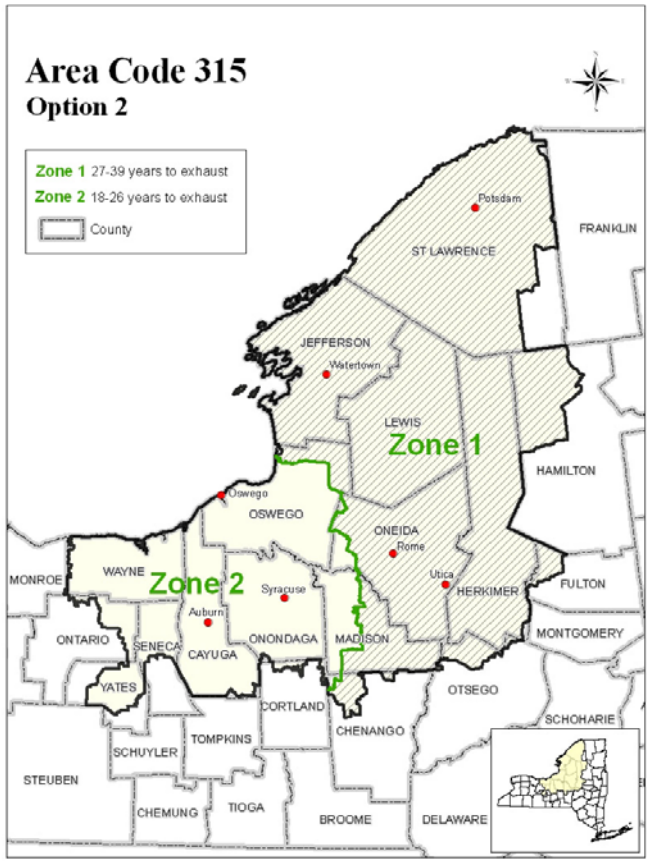
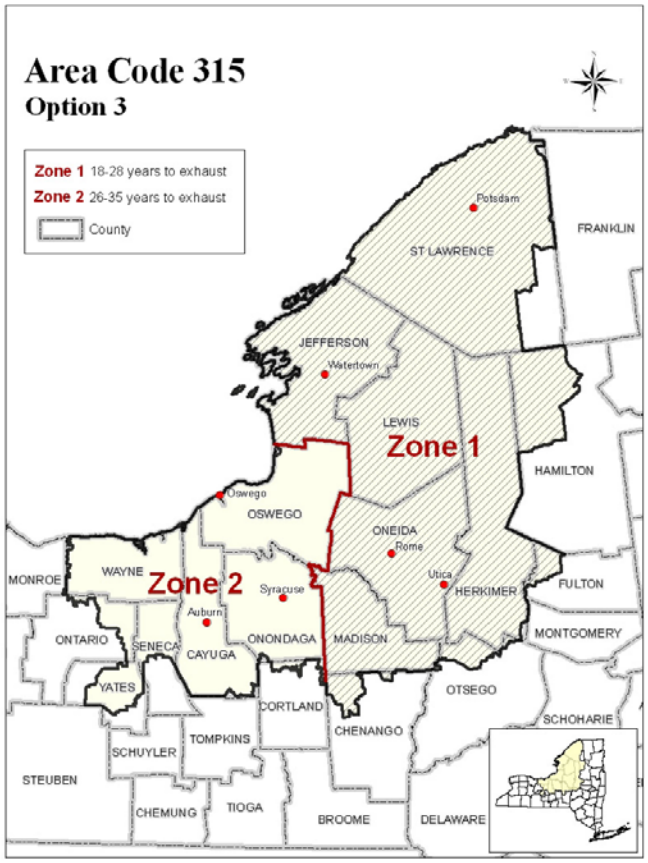
Schedule of Public Hearings and Educational Forums

Date	County	Location	Time
Thursday, May 1	St. Lawrence	Civic Center Community Room Park Street Potsdam, NY	11:00 a.m. – Educational Forum 12:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
	Jefferson	State Office Building Auditorium 317 Washington Street Watertown, NY	6:00 p.m. – Educational Forum 7:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
Friday, May 2	Lewis	Lowville Town Hall 5533 Botswick Street Lowville, NY	11:00 a.m. – Educational Forum 12:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
Monday, May 5	Herkimer	Training Center 301 North Washington Street 2nd Floor Herkimer, NY	11:00 a.m. – Educational Forum 12:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
	Oneida	Common Council Chambers 1 Kennedy Plaza Utica, NY	6:00 p.m. – Educational Forum 7:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
Tuesday, May 6	Oneida	Rome City Hall Common Council Chambers, 2nd Flr 198 North Washington Rome, NY	11:00 a.m. – Educational Forum 12:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
Wednesday, May 7	Oswego	Oswego City Hall Common Council Chambers 13 West Oneida Street Oswego, NY	11:00 a.m. – Educational Forum 12:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
	Wayne	Old Courthouse Supervisor's Chambers 26 Church Street Lyons, NY	6:00 p.m. – Educational Forum 7:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
Thursday, May 8	Seneca	Seneca Co. Office Building Supervisor's Board Room, 2nd Floor 1 DiPronia Drive Waterloo, NY	11:00 a.m. – Educational Forum 12:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
	Yates	Yates County Building Auditorium – Basement 417 Liberty Street Penn Yan, NY	6:00 p.m. – Educational Forum 7:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
Monday, May 12	Cayuga	County Legislative Office Bldg 6th Floor Chambers 160 Genesee Street Auburn, NY	6:00 p.m. – Educational Forum 7:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
Tuesday, May 13	Onondaga	City Hall Common Council Chambers 233 E. Washington Street, 3rd Floor Syracuse, NY	11:00 a.m. – Educational Forum 12:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
	Onondaga	Onondaga Public Library 447 South Salina Street Syracuse, NY	6:00 p.m. – Educational Forum 7:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing
Wednesday, May 14	Madison	The Greater Oneida Kallet Civic Ctr 159 Main Street Oneida, NY	11:00 a.m. – Educational Forum 12:00 p.m. – Public Statement Hearing

315 Area Code Relief Options







The New York Public Service Commission (PSC) is interested in comments from residents, businesses and organizations on the proposed area code options. Please indicate whether you prefer the overlay option or one of the geographic splits shown above. If your preference is for a geographic split, please identify which zone within the chosen option should retain the 315 area code. **Comments are due by May 23, 2008**.

How to Comment: (Please refer to Case-07-C-1468 in your comment)

By Mail: Honorable Jaclyn Brilling, Secretary
NYS Public Service Commission
3 Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12223

By Telephone:
Call toll-free 1-800-335-2120
Press "1"

Through the Internet:
www.AskPSC.com
Complete the PSC Comment Form found under "Contact Us"