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170 MISSOULA AREA RESIDENTS AFFECTED BY FRAUDULENT PHONE BILLING

Montana residents whose recent phone bills included phony charges billed by a company called Opticom for 3-minute collect calls to their homes from West Palm Beach, Florida, should see full credits within 60 days, according to the state Public Service Commission.

The PSC began receiving complaints in August from consumers in the Missoula area who had each been charged about \$15 for the fraudulent calls. The charges were billed on behalf of Opticom by a billing agent called Zero Plus Dialing and appeared on US West phone bills. All the complainants reported they neither accepted nor placed the collect calls. Most added they did not even know anyone in West Palm Beach.

In response to the PSC's investigation of the complaints, Opticom said all the disputed charges originated at pay phones in West Palm Beach where a company called Trans Com Network was providing the operator services under contract with Opticom. Opticom restricted outgoing calls from these pay phones upon determining they were the source of the fraudulent billing.

According to Opticom's records, 173 Montana customers were billed these charges and will receive full credits whether or not they disputed the charges. The phony billing affected 170 customers in the Missoula area, including Missoula, Milltown, Lolo, Hamilton, Stevensville, Darby and Corvallis. The remaining 3 affected customers live in Kalispell, Whitefish and Great Falls. The credits should appear on customers' US West phone bills within two months.

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