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HEADLINE: Companies ask SBC to block T-Mobile calls

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BODY:

Traffic between customers of cell phone provider T-Mobile and the customers of 12 small telephone companies in Missouri could be disrupted today after the companies asked SBC Communications Inc. to start blocking T-Mobile calls after midnight Tuesday.

T-Mobile USA, based in Bellevue, Wash., said it would route the calls through long-distance companies to avert potential disruption. T-Mobile said it is willing to negotiate with the companies.

The 12 companies, including Fidelity Telephone Co. of Sullivan, say they have tried every other avenue to get T-Mobile to pay for connecting calls to their customers over the last three years. In 2001, the Missouri Public Service Commission approved tariffs calling for wireless companies to pay the 12 companies as much as 7.5 cents a minute to connect the calls.

"Every other wireless company is either paying us through an interconnection agreement or through our tariff," said David Beier, vice president for regulatory affairs at Fidelity. T-Mobile owes Fidelity \$94,000 and continues to rack up charges for about 60,000 minutes of calls a month.

T-Mobile owes some companies in western Missouri nearly \$500,000 each, said W.R. England, a lawyer in Jefferson City who represents the 12 phone companies. England said he has been unable to get T-Mobile to negotiate agreements with the companies.

On Nov. 5, England sent T-Mobile a letter giving the company until Wednesday to negotiate agreements or face blockage of their customers' calls. SBC was scheduled to start blocking the calls at midnight Tuesday, an SBC spokeswoman confirmed.

On Friday, T-Mobile notified the Missouri Public Service Commission that it wanted to adopt the same agreements other wireless companies had with the 12 companies. But T-Mobile made no offer to compensate the company for previous charges, England said.

Besides Fidelity, the companies are Cass County Telephone Co. of Peculiar, Mo.; Citizens Telephone Co. of Higginsville, Mo.; Craw-Kan Telephone Cooperative of Girard, Kan.; Grand River Mutual Telephone Co. of Princeton, Mo.; Green Hills Telephone Corp. of Breckenridge, Mo.; Holway Telephone Co. of Maitland, Mo.; Iamo Telephone Co. of Coin, Iowa; Kingdom Telephone Co. of Auxvasse, Mo.; K & M Telephone Co. of Rich Hill, Mo.; Lathrop Telephone Co. of Princeton, Mo.; and Mark Twain Rural Telephone Cooperative of Hurdland, Mo.