

VOICE OVER INTERNET PROTOCOL (VOIP)

VOIP is an alternate telephone service. It is a technology that converts the voice signal from your telephone into a digital signal. This signal is then sent over the Internet to another VOIP or regular telephone user. You may want to consider this option for local and long distance service if you have high-speed Internet access. Most customers use VOIP with a computer, although some VOIP services allow you to use a special VOIP telephone or a regular phone with an adapter.

Service Plans: VOIP providers have different types of plans that allow you to call anywhere for a set number of minutes at a flat fee, or have separate charges for long distance calls.

Things to consider:

- VOIP may not work during a power outage. You should have some local phone service backup for emergencies.
- Enhanced 911 services may not be available.
- If you have problems with your computer, broadband connection or equipment, you may have trouble with your VOIP phone call.

Who Regulates VOIP: The Maryland Public Service Commission does not have authority over VOIP providers in Maryland. The Federal Communication Commission (www.fcc.gov) does have oversight over VOIP providers, and may step in to address public safety or serious consumer protection concerns. For more information, check out www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/voip.html .