

The most common problem: Billing

Historically, about half of the complaints received by the Montgomery County Cable Office are billing-related. Protect yourself and:

- Read all charges on your bill.
- Question any charges you do not understand or agree with.
- Verify that your previous payment has been received and credited.
- Be especially observant with bills that start or end a promotion to verify you receive the correct new rate.
- Make copies of coupons before submitting them with your bill for easier verification later.
- Don't be afraid to ask for credits for outages. You must request them to get them.
- Verify that you get credited for outages in the previous billing period.
- Weigh the convenience of automatic billing against the opportunity to review your bill before you pay.
- Cable companies must give 10 days warning prior to disconnection. You may want to check to see if there has been an entry to your credit report and whether it is accurate.

Did you know:

The line on your bill labeled *franchise fee* is the rent a cable operator pays the County for the right to use County property (rights of way) to provide cable service. The County uses the proceeds to fund the Cable Office (see below) and the public access channels. The line labeled *PEG-INET fee* represents compensation paid by the cable company, which is used by the County to fund the intranet service and channels for County government and the schools. Congress has authorized cable operators to list both of these as line items on subscriber bills.

Your county advocate is *the Cable Office*:

The Montgomery County Office of Cable and Communications Services

Cable Administrator: Jane Lawton

100 Montgomery Ave, Suite 250

Rockville MD 20850

Phone: 240 773-2288

catvcomplaints@montgomerycountymd.gov

<http://montgomerycountymd.gov/cableoffice>

This brochure was produced by Don Libes <don@libes.com> and does not necessarily represent anyone else's opinion. Last updated: Feb 28, 2006. For more information, go to: <http://www.libes.com/don/blog>

Basic Rights for Cable Users in Montgomery County, MD



Cable companies provide unique television and internet service to residents throughout Montgomery County. High-quality cable service is a necessity for many citizens for effective communication with family, government, education, and business.

As a cable subscriber in Montgomery County, MD, you have basic rights and tools to help you maintain those rights. Learn about them to better enjoy life as a cable customer.

Distributed courtesy of

Rights, Responsibilities, and Recourse

If you subscribe to any cable services, your rights include:

- phone calls answered within 30 seconds and 60 seconds to a customer service representative, 90% of the time
- phone calls returned within 24 hours
- evening service windows
- credits for outages
- proper grounding at the point of entrance to your home

If you subscribe to cable TV, your rights include:

- clear picture and sound on all channels
- repair appointments within 24 hours but not at your choice of hours
- appointments within 24 hours for problems outside, 72 hours for inside
- 10% per day rebates if service cannot be restored during a service appointment
- information about all rates and promotions available countywide and posted on franchisee web sites
- all rates uniform countywide

For more information regarding your rights, contact the MC Cable Office (see backside), the MC Office of Consumer Affairs, and the US Federal Communications Commission (fcc.gov). Residents of the city of Gaithersburg may contact the city government (gaithersburgmd.gov).

If you subscribe to internet service, your rights include:

- phone calls answered within 30 seconds and 60 seconds to a customer service representative, 75% of the time
- outside repairs completed within 36 hours from problem reporting
- pro-rated rebates for outages continuing beyond scheduled repairs
- notification of planned maintenance

Montgomery County Executive Regulation 26-03 AMII provides the above rights regarding internet (“cable modem”) service. Performance issues such as speed of upload, download and email are not regulated.

If you require guarantees, you may want to contract with a provider who can explicitly offer those guarantees while still using your existing cable service. As an example, there are many reasonably-priced companies offering email service guarantees.

Did you know:

At the present time, cable companies are unregulated in their upper-tier programming rates and selections. Rates for “limited basic” and all equipment and installations are still regulated by the local franchise authority.

If you are not satisfied:

- Start by contacting your cable provider. Be reasonable.
- If you are still not satisfied, contact the Cable Office (see reverse). The Cable Office is the local authority for the cable contracts (“franchises”) that govern the operation of cable companies in Montgomery County. The Cable Office assists subscribers and is effective in resolving most complaints quickly.
- If you are still not satisfied after 30 days, file a complaint with the Montgomery County Cable Compliance Commission. The Commission can award payments to customers from the cable franchisees for all services including cable TV and internet service. The Commission can be contacted through the Cable Office (see reverse).

Good practices:

- Keep a personal log of all problems and interactions with your provider.
- Talk to your neighbors. If your neighbors have problems similar to yours, this information may be helpful to getting your problems resolved.
- Do not ignore poor service. It is unlikely to disappear on its own.