

**INFORMATION ONLY**

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# Comcast's data cap comes to Oregon next month



The 1 terabyte threshold is very high, but as online demands increase more customers will bump up against it. (Mike Rogoway/*The Oregonian*)



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Comcast will impose a ceiling on internet usage by its Oregon customers in November, limiting them to 1 terabyte a month.

That's a very high threshold, equivalent to the capacity of a typical PC's entire hard drive or 200 high-definition movies. Comcast says its median monthly data usage is 75 gigabytes, one-thirteenth of the new threshold, and fewer than 1 percent of its customers will hit the new data cap.

## Comcast's new data cap

**What is the limit?** 1 terabyte a month, which is 1,000 gigabytes. Comcast says its median customer uses 75 gigabytes a month.

**How big is a terabyte?** A typical high-definition (1080p) movie might be 5 gigabytes. So you could stream 200 HD movies a month. But a 4K movie might be as high as 100 gigabytes, so you could download just 10 of those a month under Comcast's new plan. (Though Netflix, which streams ultra-HD video, says its streams consume about 14 gigabytes per two-hour movie.)

**When does it kick in?** Nov. 1, in Oregon.

**How much data do I use now?** If you're a Comcast customer, the company offers a [usage meter](#) to check.

**What happens if I use too much?** Comcast will send you a notice letting you know you're getting near your threshold. Then you get two months a year of courtesy "overages." After that, you pay \$10 for each additional 50 gigabytes of data you use.

**Can I buy more?** Comcast will make your current service plan unlimited for \$50 a month.

**Are these caps permanent?** Comcast says it won't lower the cap below a terabyte. But it hasn't said whether it will increase the cap as demands increase.

But it will smack a small number of intensive internet users right away and, in time, more people could find themselves bumping up against the new cap as they stream more video and download updates to their software and video games.

Many smartphone data plans already have a data cap, typically around 2 gigabytes per month, and Comcast has been testing its own data caps in some markets for several months. Now, it has set plans to roll them out in Oregon and nationwide.

Theoretically, people streaming huge volumes of data to their home accounts could strain Comcast's network capacity.

**Critics**, though, say Comcast is really trying to limit usage of online streaming services that could cut into its core business, cable TV service.

Comcast won't cut off your service if you go over the terabyte threshold. In fact, it says it'll give you two free months of overages a year. But if you keep exceeding its limit, the company will tack \$10 onto your monthly bill for each additional 50 gigabytes of data you use.

"Our data plans are based on a principle of fairness," Comcast said in a written statement. "Those who use more Internet data, pay more. And those who use less Internet data, pay less."

While few households approach Comcast's data caps today, in the future ultra-high-definition video, large updates to subscription-based software, and increasingly sophisticated online video games could push more people toward Comcast's ceiling.

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The new 4K ultra-high-definition video standard, for example, can consume as much as 100 gigabytes. Just 10 of those movies would eat up Comcast's new monthly allotment.

Comcast is, by far, the Northwest's largest cable TV and internet service provider. It has 600,000 subscribers in Oregon and Southwest Washington alone.

Most people in the Portland area have alternatives for internet service: CenturyLink serves Portland and Frontier Communications services Washington County and east Multnomah County.

Frontier has sought to differentiate itself from Comcast by [not imposing usage caps](#).

CenturyLink is experimenting with its own data caps. It's beginning with a trial market in Yakim that caps monthly data usage at 300 gigabytes a month for customers with speeds under 7 megabits per second, at 600 gigabytes on plans with speeds above that. It offers unlimited data to customers who subscribe to its premium 1-gigabit-per-second fiber-optic service.

Google Fiber, which had been contemplating service in Portland for nearly three years, does not cap data usage. But [Google shelved its Portland plans in July](#) while exploring a new wireless service, and has given no indication of when it might revisit this market.

*Clarification: This article has been clarified to indicate that Netflix's ultra-HD streams consume less data than a standard 4K ultra-HD file.*

*Correction: This article has been corrected to note that CenturyLink's caps are still in a trial phase, limited to Yakima.*

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**For Immediate Release****COMCAST TO PAY \$2.3 MILLION AFTER SUBSCRIBERS COMPLAIN OF BILLING FOR SERVICES & EQUIPMENT THEY NEVER ORDERED**  
*Will Implement Compliance Plan to End Erroneous Charges and Provide Prompt Refunds*

WASHINGTON, October 11, 2016 – The FCC’s Enforcement Bureau today announced that Comcast Corporation will pay a \$2.3 million fine to resolve an investigation into whether the company wrongfully charged cable TV customers for services and equipment that those customers never authorized. The Communications Act and the FCC’s rules prohibit a cable provider from charging its subscribers for services or equipment they did not affirmatively request, a practice known as “negative option billing.” Negative option billing burdens customers with the responsibility of contacting a cable company to dispute the charges and obtain refunds. The Communications Act and the FCC’s rules prohibit a similar practice by telecommunications carriers when unauthorized charges are placed on customers’ phone bills, an abuse known as “cramming.”

“It is basic that a cable bill should include charges only for services and equipment ordered by the customer—nothing more and nothing less,” said Travis LeBlanc, Chief of the Enforcement Bureau. “We expect all cable and phone companies to take responsibility for the accuracy of their bills and to ensure their customers have authorized any charges.”

The Commission received numerous complaints from consumers alleging that Comcast added charges to their bills for unordered services or products, such as premium channels, set-top boxes, or digital video recorders (DVRs). In some complaints, subscribers claimed that they were billed despite specifically declining service or equipment upgrades offered by Comcast. In others, customers claimed that they had no knowledge of the unauthorized charges until they received unordered equipment in the mail, obtained notifications of unrequested account changes by email, or conducted a review of their monthly bills. Consumers described expending significant time and energy to attempt to remove the unauthorized charges from their bills and obtain refunds. In response to these complaints, the FCC undertook an investigation of the company.

Under the terms of today’s settlement, Comcast will pay the largest civil penalty assessed from a cable operator by the FCC and implement a five-year compliance plan. Specifically, Comcast will adopt processes and procedures designed to obtain affirmative informed consent from customers prior to charging them for any new services or equipment. Comcast will also send customers an order confirmation separate from any other bill, clearly and conspicuously describing newly added products and their associated charges. Further, Comcast will offer to customers, at no cost, the ability to block the addition of new services or equipment to their accounts. In addition, the settlement requires Comcast to implement a detailed program for redressing disputed charges in a standardized and expedient fashion,

and limits adverse action (such as referring an account to collections or suspending service) while a disputed charge is being investigated.

To file a complaint with the FCC, go to <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us> or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or by writing to:

Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

The Consent Decree is available at: [https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/DA-16-1127A1.pdf](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-16-1127A1.pdf).

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*This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).*