

Adult Foster Home Provider Alert

Policy updates, rule clarifications and announcements

Date: February 19, 2015

Topic: **Adult Foster Home Telephone Requirements: Questions & Answers**

Provider: APD (Older Adults and Adults with Physical Disabilities)
 DD (Developmental Disabilities)

The purpose of this AFH Provider Alert is to assist adult foster home licensees to understand the regulatory requirements about telephones in adult foster homes. OAR 411-050-0645(5) states each adult foster home must have a **working, corded, landline telephone** with a **listed number**. The corded landline phone must have a phone line separate from any other line, such as a fax line, unless it has a feature that automatically switches to the appropriate mode.

Q: Why does my AFH need to have a corded landline phone?

A: An approved landline phone is a corded phone that can continue to work during power outages because it does not rely on electrical power. These phones are typically powered by copper telephone lines. Another advantage of this type of landline phone is that calls to the 911 operator will display the physical location of the phone, which can be critical in emergency situations. Adult foster homes may benefit from having other types of phones such as cordless phones, cell phones or a telephone through the home's Internet service, but at least one corded landline powered by telephone lines is required in each licensed home.

Q: Why can't I use my phone that is connected through the Internet?

A: AFH Providers may continue to use other types of telephones in addition to but not instead of having at least one corded landline as described above. Phone service through the Internet, called voice over Internet protocol (VoIP), or voice over broadband (VoBB), relies on electrical power as well as the Internet service

provider. If there is an interruption to the service, the phone service becomes unavailable.

Q: I like the convenience of a cell phone and I always keep an extra battery on hand. Why isn't that acceptable?

A: Many AFH providers utilize cell phones in addition to an approved landline phone and that is fine. Cell phones can provide a great benefit to the user because, as an example, they can subscribe to emergency alert notices. However, a cell phone may not be used exclusively, or instead of a traditional corded landline, because:

- In the event of a natural disaster, cell phone service diminishes as many people try to use their phones at once. Cell towers may be down temporarily for repairs or they may be damaged in a disaster situation leaving the caller cut off from all calls and texts.
- Cell phones that rely on a battery or a solar powered charger may be weak or dead when needed. Keeping another fully charged battery is an excellent practice, but even solar-powered chargers need the sun to charge and a backup battery may not last long enough in some emergencies.
- Cell phones are easily misplaced.
- In an emergency, the 911 operator sees a general location rather than a physical address, which may be critical in an emergency.

Q: Did the rules about telephones in adult foster homes change?

A: There has not been a substantive change to this section of the rules since 2007. Language was added in the September 1, 2013 rules to clarify telephones that are connected through the Internet may not be used in place of a corded landline.

Additional considerations regarding telephones in adult foster homes:

Internet Phone Service

Phone service through an Internet provider (VoIP and VoBB) may be interrupted for a variety of reasons such as a problem with the modem or router and a problem with the service provider's network interface card or server.

Privacy Concerns

Adult foster home providers must be vigilant to protect the resident's right to privacy. Reasonable precautions should be taken to ensure confidential information is not overheard by unauthorized individuals.

- Be aware that cordless calls can be overheard by individuals using radio scanners. Some cordless phone conversations can be overheard on baby monitors, walkie-talkies and other cordless phones.
- There is a greater tendency for people using cordless phones or cell phones to be mobile while talking on the phone, increasing the likelihood of being overheard.
- Providers must make a working telephone available to residents with reasonable accommodation for privacy during their phone conversations. (See OAR 411-050-0645(5)(b) about accommodation for residents with hearing impairments.)
- Corded landline phones are *not* subject to hacking.