



CELL PHONE CONTRACTS



Often when PCSing to Europe the first thing a Soldier want to obtain is a Cell Phone. This means that he or she must decide if they want a "Contract Phone" or "Pre-Paid Service". Be advised that cell phone contracts differ in Europe!! Many Soldiers and family members not knowing the difference often rush to the first cell phone dealer they run into and sign a contract without knowing the facts. Take the time to shop around and choose the right plan for you!!! If the cell-phone contract is written in German or Italian, you may want to think twice before signing a contract that you don't understand.

BELOW IS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CELL PHONE CONTRACTS BEFORE SIGNING ON THE DOTTED LINE:

Military Clauses. Soldiers are used to using their orders to break their phone contracts when they deploy in the US. This is different than how contacts work in Europe. Soldiers must read their cell phone contracts carefully because a "military clause" is not generally available on European cell contracts. So, SMS may be stuck paying a large bill or penalty when they deploy or PCS. Also, don't take the contract representative's oral promise that you can break you contract if you deploy, you must see this in writing.

Rollover contracts are common in Europe. For example, when a SM signs up for a 2-year contract, he often does not know what happens at the end of the contract period. Usually the SM thinks he's on month-to-month service at the end of the contract, and can break it at any time. Instead, the contract usually contains a rollover clause, **meaning that at the end of the initial 2-year period, it rolls into another 2-year contract without any notice to the consumer.** And then the SM is in the same boat when he deploys or PCSes, and is stuck paying more than he owes.

Hidden charges. Another common issue is the additional charges that often apply when you are talking to someone on another carrier. Although the cell phone companies present this as a "discount" when you talk to people on their network, it's really the opposite. There are additional charges for talking to someone outside their network. So, this is definitely something to consider when choosing whether to go with a pre-paid or contact service.

Pre-paid cell phones are readily available in Europe. If you want to get cell service right away, but don't know what your situation will be in 3 or 6 months, it's best to start with a pre-paid service and an inexpensive phone. After you've settled in and have a better idea about your situation, you can shop around for what you really want (if that pre-paid doesn't satisfy your needs). You may even be able to keep the same phone number, since most phones will let you transfer the SIM card between them. Pre-Paid cell minutes can be purchased at any cell phone dealer (on or off post) and at many gas stations and grocery stores on the economy.

Check with your US cell carrier to see if your existing phone will work in Europe. If your US phone is unlocked, you may just need to buy a SIM card and set up a pre-paid service for your new phone number. That means no need to purchase a new phone when you arrive. If your phone is locked, your cell phone company in the U.S. may be able to unlock it for you before you PCS.

Finally, if you have a problem with your cell phone carrier, you can always see a Legal Assistance attorney to help resolve the issue. Your garrison Legal Center provides assistance on many consumer law issues, including disputes with European vendors.