

Prepare for 3G Network Shutdowns

By the GWAAR Legal Services Team

If you have an older mobile phone, you may need to upgrade it soon. Mobile providers will be shutting down their 3G networks in 2022, which means that older phones may be unable to make or receive text messages and phone calls, including calls to 911, or use data services. In addition to phones, this may affect some medical devices, tablets, smartwatches, home security systems, and other products that use 3G network services. The 3G network retirement is being done in order to free up infrastructure to support new technology, like 5G.

For more information on your mobile provider's plans to phase out 3G, contact your provider directly. Timing will vary by company. AT&T announced that it will shut down its 3G network by February 2022. Verizon plans to shut down its 3G network by December 31, 2022. T-Mobile will shut down Sprint's 3G CDMA network by March 31, 2022 and Sprint's 4G LTE network by June 30, 2022. The company also announced it will shut down T-Mobile's 3G UMTS network by July 1, 2022. Other mobile providers will be affected, too. Many carriers, like Cricket, Boost, and several Lifeline mobile service providers use AT&T's, Verizon's, and T-Mobile's networks.

It's important to plan ahead so that you don't lose the ability to use your phone or other devices. Some providers' websites have lists of devices that will no longer be supported after 3G networks are shut down. You can also check your phone or other device's settings or user manual to determine whether it is 4G LTE enabled. If your device is not labeled, contact the monitoring company or other service provider to confirm how the device connects and whether your device may be impacted.

Some devices may need to be upgraded while others will just require a software update. Many mobile service providers are offering discounted or free upgrades for people who need to purchase a new device. In addition, some people may be eligible for assistance through two Federal Communications Commission programs.

The Lifeline Program provides discounted phone service to qualifying low-income consumers. You can learn more about the Lifeline Program here:

<https://psc.wi.gov/Pages/Programs/LifeLineLinkup.aspx>

The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program provides a temporary discount towards broadband service to eligible households during the COVID-19 public health emergency. You can learn more about the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program here:

<https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>