

Do you have an old cellphone? Read this, you may lose service

January 12 2022, by Betty Lin-Fisher



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Larry Miller admits he's not too techy.

He has a computer, but uses it as a word processor. He goes to the library

regularly to check email or go on the internet.

"I was dragged kicking and screaming into the computer age," said the 82-year-old retired writer who lives in Springfield Township, Ohio.

His cellphone is a flip [phone](#). He thinks he bought it 10 years ago, and he uses Tracfone to buy buckets of minutes since he doesn't want an expensive monthly bill.

He only has it for emergencies and to call his adult son in West Virginia with prepaid cell minutes instead of hefty landline long distance rates.

But now Miller and others nationwide who have old phones on the nation's 3G cellular network are going to have to buy a new phone if they want service.

The nation's major cellular phone carriers are sunsetting, or shutting down, their 3G networks, which were first introduced 20 years ago and rely on older technology, to make room for more advanced network services, including 5G, said the Federal Communications Commission.

"As a result, many older cellphones will be unable to make or receive calls and texts, including calls to 911, or use data services. This will affect 3G mobile phones and certain older 4G mobile phones that do not support Voice over LTE (VoLTE or HD Voice)," the FCC said.

This could also impact other gadgets, such as [medical devices](#), home security systems, smart watches, vehicle SOS services and other connected products may be using 3G network services, the FCC said.

The various cell companies will be retiring or sunsetting their 3G networks throughout this year. Here's information on dates from the FCC. It's possible dates could change, but it's good to know what is

coming up so you can prepare, if needed:

AT&T will finish shutting down its 3G network by February (bit.ly/3qgPtUE).

Verizon will finish shutting down its 3G network by Dec. 31 (vz.to/3fd3UTf).

T-Mobile will finish shutting down Sprint's 3G CDMA network by March 31 (t-mo.co/3r2gFpc), and Sprint's 4G LTE network by June 30. It also announced it will shut down T-Mobile's 3G UMTS network by July 1, but has not yet announced a shutdown date for its 2G network.

If your mobile carrier is not listed here, you may still be affected. Many carriers, such as Cricket, Boost, Straight Talk and several Lifeline mobile service providers, utilize AT&T's, Verizon's and T-Mobile's networks.

A technology story by my USA Today colleague Brett Molina has more detail and can be found at tinyurl.com/2p9xj2dm.

When the 3G [network](#) goes away, people will not be able to use their phones over that [cellular network](#), even for 911 calls. You may be able to use Wi-Fi.

But it's not just old flip phones that are still on 3G and will be affected; some older smartphones will be affected, too—including an iPhone 5 or older model as well as several models of the Samsung Galaxy.

So what should you do? I included links in this column by the sunset dates for the specific major carriers' information. Or all of the carriers have lists of impacted phones if you search the internet for the name of the carrier and 3G sunset or 3G shutdown. Or call or take your phone to

your provider's store. In some cases, some phones may need a software upgrade, but that will be the easy fix. Most older devices on 3G will need a new phone.

Miller wasn't sure whether his old phone was affected when he originally emailed me before the holidays. He had read an article alerting senior citizens that their phones may not work in 2022.

He took it to his local Walmart electronics counter, where he usually buys the Tracfone prepaid cards.

The Walmart employee "kind of pooh-poohed the whole thing," Miller told me. "He didn't think it was a big deal. He said he was aware of the issue" and told Miller he'd probably need to buy a new phone for 30 to 40 bucks.

When Miller and I met up with a Beacon Journal photographer, he showed me his phone. I showed Miller where he could find the model number for the phone by opening the back battery case and taking the battery out. The model number is under the battery.

But we didn't even need to look up on the internet whether his Tracfone was going to be affected by the 3G shutdown.

When I powered up the phone again, a message popped up, warning that his active service was only through July 18. His phone also said 3G on the upper left of the screen once it fully powered up.

Miller says he has no choice but to upgrade his phone, even though it works perfectly fine for him. He wants another simple phone, but said he has trouble opening the [flip phone](#), so he'll look for something a little easier—and cheap.

"I will get one. I guess if I have to," he said.

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