

CONSUMER CORNER

Straight Talk On Going Wireless

(NAPSA)—It's a good call to learn about cell phones before going wireless. Service providers' plans change constantly, making it important to shop around, consider each offer carefully and ask these basic questions:

- How will I use my cell phone? For emergencies or more frequently?

- When will I make most of my calls? During the day, at night or on weekends?

- Where will I be making and receiving calls? Close to home or far away?

- How much can I afford for telephone service, including wireless?

Wireless plans vary. Some provide a specific number of minutes each month—with these plans you may lose minutes you don't use and pay extra if you use more. Other alternatives include prepaid and preset spending plans. These plans may let you use your minutes anytime, or there may be limits for use during "peak time" (usually weekdays) and "off-peak" time (nights and weekends).

Where you use your service matters, too. The phone may not work in all geographic locations. Weather, tall buildings and other factors can also affect service.

Some wireless plans are based on "home areas"; others offer nationwide service. If you make or receive calls while outside of your home area, there may be a "roaming" charge on top of the minutes you use. Even within your home area, some calls may be long distance. Wireless plans may include long-distance calls at the same rate, or charge more for them.

Many wireless companies provide Internet access. Some offer



No Strings Attached—Cell phone consumers should be sure to understand the terms of their service contracts.

unlimited service, while others charge by the minute or the kilobyte. Another popular service is text-messaging, which lets you send small notes to other wireless users.

It's important to know all the terms for wireless service, including the costs, the cancellation policy, and if there's a penalty for breaking the service contract (if you have one).

For more advice on choosing wireless service and phones, consumers can order up to 10 copies of NCL's new *Going Wireless* brochure by calling, toll-free, 888-8-PUEBLO (M-F 8 a.m.-8 p.m. ET); by faxing 719-948-9724; by writing to FCIC-03B, P.O. Box 100, Pueblo, CO 81002; or by visiting www.pueblo.gsa.gov.