



City of Seattle

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News Release

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For Immediate Release:

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After one year, city's phone book opt-out program is big success

75,000 residents and businesses have stopped more than 420,000 unwanted deliveries

SEATTLE — More than one-fifth of all Seattle households and businesses have used www.seattle.gov/stopphonebooks, made a phone call, or mailed a postcard to opt out of telephone book deliveries since the service was started by the city, last May 5.

“We know there are still many residents and businesses who want to stop unwanted phone books from landing on their porches and we’re working to reach them this spring,” said City Councilmember Mike O’Brien, whose leadership resulted in the phone book opt-out legislation last year.

“Ultimately, we hope every resident and business will let publishers know whether or not they want to receive a phone book.”

More than 75,000 residents and businesses have stopped nearly 420,000 individual unwanted phone book deliveries — saving 375 tons of paper. Those savings will continue every year because opt-outs are permanent until the user opts back in.

“Right now is a good time to go online or make a phone call to opt out, because the 2012 phone book delivery cycle begins in June,” said O’Brien. “Opting out of all or some phone books now can stop deliveries for this year – and permanently.”

May 22 is the last day to opt out to stop deliveries of Dex phone books this year, according to Seattle Public Utilities (SPU). Under the regulations established by the city, residents and businesses must opt out at least 30 days before deliveries start, giving phone book publishers time to remove opt-outs from their lists of delivery addresses.

As many as 25,000 more households and businesses are expected to use the stopphonebooks system this year, SPU planners said.

Dex delivers in June and July. Two other companies, Yellowbook and Supermedia deliver yellow pages in the fall. The www.seattle.gov/stopphonebooks website allows users to opt out of some

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or all phone book titles, including residential listings, the “white pages.” Phone book deliveries can also be stopped by calling (206) 504-3066, an automated line.

The city expects to open a Spanish language version of the call-in line in June.

Seattle businesses and residents using the opt-out system have stopped an average of 5.5 individual phone book deliveries per address, so it appears that many of them have canceled all of the six phone books that were slated for delivery last year.

City regulations allow SPU to fine publishers \$125 for each valid complaint that a yellow pages book was delivered despite a timely opt-out request when errors exceed one-half of 1 percent of total opt outs for any one title. In the 2011 delivery cycle, all three publishers stayed under the limit and none were fined.

The www.seattle.gov/stopphonebooks web pages are operated under contract to the city by Catalog Choice, a company which runs similar opt-out programs for other governments including King County, Chicago, Berkeley and San Jose, Calif., and Kansas City Metro, among others. Once on the site, users can opt out of both phone books and junk mail. Or for junk mail, they can go directly to www.seattle.gov/stopjunkmail. There is no phone service for stopping junk mail.

Residents and businesses outside Seattle can use King County’s site, www.KCecoconsumer.com to stop both phone books and junk mail.

Learn more about Seattle Public Utilities, at: <http://www.seattle.gov/util>.

Follow SPU on Twitter: www.twitter.com/SeattleSPU.

In addition to providing a reliable water supply to more than 1.3 million customers in the Seattle metropolitan area, SPU provides essential sewer, drainage, solid waste and engineering services that safeguard public health, maintain the city’s infrastructure and protect, conserve and enhance the region's environmental resources.



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Seattle's Yellow Pages Opt-Out Service

Key Facts

- Created by City Ordinance 123427; started on-line May 5, 2011.
- Funded in part by yellow pages publishers who pay a 14-cent fee (\$0.14) for each yellow pages phone book delivered in Seattle. For 685,522 books delivered in the 2011 cycle, publishers paid more than \$95,973.08 to the city.
- Through Friday, April 20, 75,936 residents and business have signed up for the service — more than one-fifth of the City.
- They've opted out of 419,779 individual phone book deliveries, saving 375 tons of paper annually.
- Publishers may be fined \$125 for delivering yellow pages directories to anyone who has stopped phone book delivery through the City's www.seattle.gov/stopphonebooks system if errors exceed ½ of 1% (0.5%) of opt-outs on file. None were fined for the 2011 delivery cycle.
- Residents and businesses may also use the system to stop delivery of residential phone directories — the “white” pages. Publishers are not charged for these deliveries since they are required by state regulations, nor can they be fined for failing to honor white pages opt-outs.
- The stop phone books program is operated for the City under contract by Catalog Choice, a non-profit based in Berkeley, CA, which also offers junk mail opt out services. King County uses Catalog Choice to offer junk mail and phone book opt-out services at www.KCecoconsumer.com. King County's phone book opt-out program does not include revenue from publishers and publishers are not required to cooperate as they are in Seattle.

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- Seattle's stop phone books program is unique in the United States; however, yellow pages publishers have sued the city, claiming the ordinance unlawfully restricts their free speech rights. The publishers lost in U.S. District Court last year and a decision in their appeal to the 9th U.S. District Court of Appeals is pending within the next few months.
- Since Seattle's ordinance passed, one company, Supermedia, has stopped or reduced distribution of its yellow pages titles in Seattle, citing market forces unrelated to the ordinance. The change reduced total yellow pages deliveries by an additional 600,000.
- Including Supermedia's delivery reductions along with other management changes by the publishers, opt-outs made directly to them and opt-outs from the city program, SPU estimates that more than 1 million fewer yellow pages directories were delivered in the city in 2011 compared to 2010, using at least 900 tons less paper.

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