Q3 2026 EDITION

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Copper Retirement Bulletin

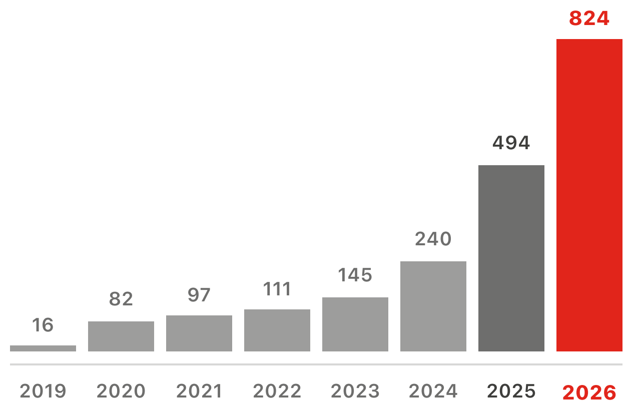
The State of the U.S. Copper Retirement: Line Counts, Regulatory Actions, and How to Prepare

THIS QUARTER IN SHORT

The U.S. copper network is being retired faster than at any point since the transition began: 15 million lines remain, declining roughly 18% a year, and a retirement can now take effect on as little as 90 days of notice. AT&T — approved to discontinue more than 30% of its copper footprint this year — intends to exit most copper operations by the end of 2029. If fire alarm panels, elevator phones, fax, or point-of-sale still run on copper, the planning window is set by the carrier, not you.

AT&T copper retirement notices, 2019–2026

Up 51× since 2019 · more than tripled since 2024

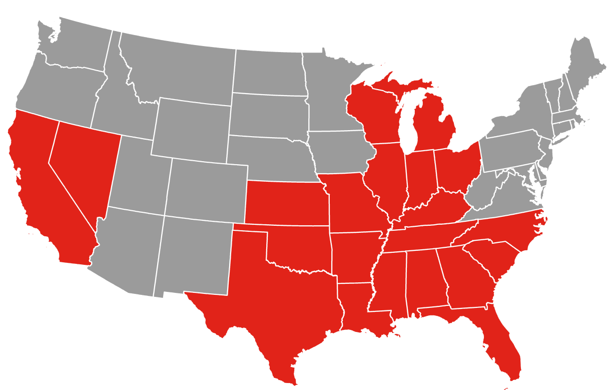


15M
Copper POTS lines still in service, declining 17.9% per year

90 days
Minimum public notice before a copper retirement takes effect

30%+
Of AT&T's copper footprint approved for discontinuance in 2026

$3,300+
Documented monthly rates on remaining copper lines



21 states with AT&T discontinued service areas — more than 100,000 location entries; CA, KS, and NV added since mid-2025.

AT&T: Grandfathering effective October 15th, 2025: no new copper line orders accepted; existing lines stay on rising rates until each wire center is retired.

Lumen: new copper POTS orders closed across legacy CenturyLink states, with rolling Rule 51.333 copper-retirement notices covering wire centers in multiple states.

AL · AR · CA · FL · GA · IL · IN · KS · KY · LA · MI · MO · MS · NC · NV · OH · OK · SC · TN · TX · WI

Red outline marks states added since mid-2025. Wire-center-level timing varies; confirm locations against your carrier's current notices. Full sourcing for the figures, chart, and map: see Methodology and Sources.

01 REGULATORY AND CARRIER MILESTONES

DATE	MILESTONE	SOURCE
June 30, 2025	FCC data vintage: 15.0 million end-user switched-access lines remain in service nationwide, down 17.9% per year since mid-2022.	FCC, Voice Telephone Services Report
October 15, 2025	AT&T grandfathering takes effect across its copper wire centers: no new copper voice or specialty line orders are accepted.	AT&T CLEC Online, Network Disclosures
January 13, 2026	Reporting on FCC approvals shows AT&T authorized to discontinue service across more than 30% of its copper footprint during 2026.	Broadband Breakfast
March 26, 2026	The FCC adopts Report and Order FCC 26-19, streamlining copper retirement and legacy service discontinuance: a uniform 31-day automatic-approval window, grandfathering of legacy voice and low-speed data through customer notice, and asserted preemption of state or local rules that would delay a federally authorized retirement.	FCC 26-19 news release
May 2026	AT&T petitions the FCC to declare that California rules cannot impede full POTS discontinuance in the affected areas; the FCC opens the petition for public comment (WC Docket No. 26-125).	FCC Public Notice DA 26-520

02 KEY IMPLICATIONS

Support for copper central offices diminishes as retirement approaches: repairs get slower and harder to schedule, which raises the odds of extended outages on the lines that remain.

Rates on remaining copper lines have risen steadily for a decade and are expected to keep rising until the lines are retired; documented cases now exceed $3,300 per line per month.

The timeline is compressed at both ends: full retirement notices have historically given customers 180 days to move (per MetTel's tracking), and under the FCC's streamlined rules a retirement can take effect on as little as 90 days of public notice.

Carriers discontinuing voice service are no longer required to offer a stand-alone voice replacement; a bundled alternative can satisfy the requirement.

Copper retirement reaches beyond phones. Fire alarm panels, elevator emergency phones, security systems, fax, and point-of-sale lines are all affected, and a disconnected life-safety line is a code problem: it can block inspections and occupancy sign-off or force paid fire-watch coverage until communication is restored.

Demand for replacement hardware and installation surges as each wave of notices lands; organizations that wait for their notice compete for equipment and scheduling with everyone else who waited.

03 HOW TO PREPARE FOR COPPER DECOMMISSIONING

1

Inventory your copper-based services

List every copper line and what runs on it, paying closest attention to safety-critical and business-critical specialty lines: fire panels, elevator phones, security systems, fax machines, and point-of-sale devices.

2

Match each endpoint to compatible replacement hardware

Most replacement products have compatibility limits with analog signaling. Life-safety endpoints need certified equipment and sign-off from your alarm company, elevator contractor, and the authority having jurisdiction.

3

Plan the transition before the notice arrives

Migrating on your own schedule is cheaper and calmer than migrating inside a notice window, and installation demand rises with every notice wave. Verify each line's replacement before the copper is disconnected.

Step-by-step planning guidance: dataremote.com/blog/complete-guide-to-pots-line-replacement-2026 and dataremote.com/blog/pots-line-replacement-cost

04 THE REPLACEMENT PATH: COPPER POTS LINES VS. POTS IN A BOX®

DataRemote's POTS line replacement keeps the analog interface and retires the copper underneath it. POTS IN A BOX® appliances present standard RJ-11 FXS ports locally and carry voice, fax, DTMF, and alarm signaling over managed cellular (5G/LTE) or wired IP, with integrated battery backup, automatic cellular failover, and E911 support on properly provisioned models and configurations. Every appliance is managed through the Ara platform: provisioning, real-time line status, alerts, and remote diagnostics.

FEATURE	TRADITIONAL COPPER POTS LINE	POTS IN A BOX®
Technology	TDM over copper pairs with an analog POTS handoff	Managed cellular (5G/LTE) or wired IP with the same analog RJ-11/FXS handoff
Use cases	Voice, alarms, elevators, fire panels, fax, point-of-sale	The same endpoints, preserved without replacing the equipment
Availability	Grandfathered and being retired; AT&T targets nationwide copper retirement by 2029	Available today over certified nationwide 5G/LTE networks
Monthly cost	Repricing upward as regulation winds down; documented rates above $3,300/month in some states	Predictable managed pricing, with savings up to 50%
Power outages	Central-office line power, degrading as copper plant ages	Integrated UPS battery backup of up to 48 hours, depending on model and load
Failover	Manual intervention and carrier tickets	Automatic cellular failover and dual-SIM carrier redundancy
Monitoring	None; faults surface when something fails	Real-time line status, alerts, and remote diagnostics via Ara
E-911	Fixed street address on file	E911 with GNSS geo-location on supported models and configurations

Certification and listing status is model-specific; each product page publishes the exact records for that model: dataremote.com/pots-in-a-box

05 PROVEN AT SCALE

The largest documented POTS transformations in the federal space run on POTS IN A BOX® hardware, deployed and managed by DataRemote's partner, MetTel.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

$54M · 1,875 facilities

MetTel secured a $54 million contract to modernize roughly 15,000 landlines across 1,875 VA facilities, using DataRemote's POTS IN A BOX® to migrate lines while keeping existing analog equipment in service.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

23,000 · postal locations

MetTel earned a 2024 USPS Supplier Excellence Award for modernizing landlines at roughly 23,000 postal locations with DataRemote's POTS IN A BOX® hardware, managed centrally through the Ara platform.

06 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is POTS replacement?

POTS (Plain Old Telephone Service) replacement is the migration of analog copper telephone lines to a managed cellular or IP connection using an on-site appliance that presents the same analog interface, so the connected equipment keeps operating unchanged. It preserves the line while retiring the copper underneath it, which is what keeps fire panels, elevator phones, fax machines, and point-of-sale devices working without being replaced.

When do I need to act?

Before your notice arrives. Grandfathering already blocks new copper orders across much of the AT&T and Lumen footprints, retirement notices are accelerating year over year, and a retirement can take effect on as little as 90 days of public notice under the FCC's streamlined rules. Organizations that migrate on their own schedule avoid the pricing, scheduling, and compliance pressure of migrating inside a notice window.

Which lines are most at risk?

Code-governed and business-critical specialty lines: fire alarm panels, elevator emergency phones, security systems, fax, and point-of-sale devices. These endpoints depend on analog signaling behaviors that generic VoIP adapters often do not preserve, and for life-safety lines the replacement must satisfy the applicable code and the authority having jurisdiction, not just provide dial tone.

How does DataRemote address copper retirement?

POTS IN A BOX® appliances present standard RJ-11 FXS ports locally and carry voice, fax, DTMF, and alarm signaling over managed cellular (5G/LTE) or wired IP, with integrated battery backup, automatic cellular failover, and E911 support on properly provisioned models and configurations. Every appliance is managed through the Ara platform for provisioning, real-time line status, alerts, and remote diagnostics, which is how deployments scale to thousands of sites.

How is this bulletin updated?

Quarterly. Each edition is a dated record: new editions are added and prior editions are archived unchanged, so a citation to a specific edition stays accurate. Every figure links to its source, and third-party tracking data is always attributed to the organization that produced it.

Talk to a POTS Replacement Specialist

Tell us what's running on your copper lines — phones, alarms, elevators, fax, POS — and we'll map each line to a managed replacement before the retirement notice arrives.

WEB	SALES	SUPPORT	EMAIL
dataremote.com/contact	305-521-7400	1-800-848-1617	sales@dataremote.com

07 METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This edition compiles verified public data with primary sourcing wherever a primary record exists. Line counts and decline rates come from the FCC's Voice Telephone Services Report; regulatory actions from FCC orders and public notices (FCC 26-19, DA 26-520, and the Section 251 network-change rules); footprint approvals from cited independent reporting; carrier retirement and grandfathering notices from the venues where carriers publish them (AT&T CLEC Online Network Disclosures; Lumen's Rule 51.333 public notices); and the discontinued-service-area state list directly from AT&T's own Discontinued Service Areas workbook, retrieved and reviewed by DataRemote on August 17, 2026. Annual notice tallies and copper rate observations are attributed to MetTel's Copper Retirement Bulletin, the only published source for those series. No figure is estimated or modeled by DataRemote. Full DataRemote-derived notice tracking by type and wire center is planned for a future edition and will be published with its method.

Page 1 figure and chart sourcing: 15M lines in service — FCC, Voice Telephone Services Report (June 30, 2025), down from 27.2 million in mid-2022, a 17.9% compound annual decline. 90-day notice — FCC Section 251 network-change rules; FCC 26-19 (March 26, 2026) added a uniform 31-day automatic-approval window for discontinuance. 30%+ footprint — Broadband Breakfast (January 13, 2026). $3,300+ monthly rates — MetTel, Copper Retirement Bulletin (July 2026), documented across 10 states. Notices-by-year chart — AT&T publishes its Section 251 network-change notices on its CLEC Online Network Disclosures site; annual counts as tallied by MetTel (July 2026), whose 2026 figure includes 330 notices issued since January 1, 2026. DataRemote's own check of AT&T's disclosure listings on August 17, 2026 found more than 580 network-change disclosures listed for 2025 alone, consistent with the acceleration shown. States-impacted map — AT&T, Prime Access Discontinued Service Areas workbook (retrieved August 17, 2026).

1. FCC, Voice Telephone Services Report (data as of June 30, 2025) — fcc.gov/voice-telephone-services-report
2. FCC, Section 251 wireline network changes — fcc.gov/wireline-competition/general/section-251-wireline-network-changes
3. FCC Report and Order FCC 26-19, news release (March 26, 2026) — docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-420132A1.txt
4. FCC Public Notice DA 26-520, WC Docket No. 26-125 — docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-26-520A1.pdf
5. Broadband Breakfast, "AT&T Approved to Discontinue Service at More Than 30% of Copper Footprint This Year" (January 13, 2026) — broadbandbreakfast.com
6. AT&T CLEC Online, Network Disclosures — clec.att.com
7. AT&T, Prime Access Discontinued Service Areas (workbook, retrieved August 17, 2026) — clec.att.com (XLSX)
8. CenturyLink (Lumen), Public Notice of Copper Retirement under Rule 51.333 — centurylink.com (PDF)
9. MetTel, Copper Retirement Bulletin (July 2026) — mettel.net (PDF) (notice tallies and rate observations only)
10. DataRemote Newsroom, "DataRemote Powers MetTel's $54M VA POTS Transformation Contract" — dataremote.com/newsroom/news/va-pots-transformation
11. DataRemote Newsroom, "MetTel Wins USPS Supplier Award — Powered by DataRemote" — dataremote.com/newsroom

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dataremote.com/resources/research/copper-retirement-bulletin

This bulletin is provided for general information and is not legal, regulatory, or code-compliance advice. Figures reflect their cited sources as of the data date shown above; confirm current requirements and timelines with the FCC, your carrier, and the authorities having jurisdiction over your systems. Final acceptance of any life-safety installation depends on the product model, endpoint compatibility, installation, configuration, code edition, and the authority having jurisdiction.