

If you live in California and want a plain old landline that works over the original copper wiring, you are swimming against the current of the telecom industry. Fiber, cable, and wireless voice have taken the spotlight. Yet copper landlines still exist in many neighborhoods, often quietly, supported by a shrinking set of companies and a complex web of regulation.

I work with customers who still rely on traditional phone service, from seniors who keep a corded phone on the kitchen wall to small businesses that insist their alarm panel and elevator line stay on copper. The same questions keep coming up: Who still offers real landline service? Which companies have abandoned copper? And how long will any of this last?

This guide focuses on California, with an eye to practical reality at the address level, not the marketing brochures. I will cover who still supports copper landlines, how to tell what you actually have, and what to consider if you want to keep a line that works when the internet or power goes out.

## What “original copper landline” really means in 2024

When people say “landline” today, they can mean several different things. If you care about reliability, 911 accuracy, or compatibility with older devices, the distinction matters.

An original copper landline, sometimes called POTS (Plain Old Telephone Service), has three defining traits:

1. It rides on twisted-pair copper from your premises all the way back to the phone company’s central office, with no dependency on your home electricity.
2. It provides dial tone, ring voltage, and voice service from the central office, not from your modem, router, or a fiber ONT on your wall.
3. It is regulated as basic telephone service, with carrier-of-last-resort obligations in many areas of California.

If your phone plugs into a modem, cable box, or fiber terminal, you almost certainly do not have original POTS. You have “digital voice” or VoIP, even **Phone Systems Company California** if it comes from AT&T, Frontier, Comcast/Xfinity, Spectrum, or a smaller VoIP provider.

That difference shows up at 2 am in a winter storm when the power is out. A real copper line usually keeps working, sometimes for days. A VoIP or “digital home phone” line usually goes down as soon as your modem or ONT loses power, unless you have a local battery or generator.

## The short answer: who still supports copper landlines in California?

As of mid-2024, original copper landlines still exist in much of California, though availability varies by neighborhood and is shrinking over time.

At a high level, copper POTS is still supported by:

- AT&T California (the legacy Pacific Bell / SBC territory)
- Frontier Communications and its legacy companies in California (ex-GTE, Verizon California, and Citizens)
- A cluster of independent rural carriers (for example, Cal-Ore, Ponderosa, Sierra, Volcano, Ducor, Pinnacles, and others)
- A few small municipal or cooperative systems in very specific areas

Availability does not mean the company is excited to sell you that service. In many cases, the sales rep will push fiber, fixed wireless, or bundled internet and “digital voice” first. Sometimes you have to ask specifically for “traditional landline” or “basic residence service” to even get accurate information.

Regulatory decisions by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) are also driving change. AT&T, for example, has asked the CPUC for permission to stop being the “carrier of last resort” for landline service in many areas. That process is still under review as of 2024. Whatever the outcome, landlines will not disappear overnight, but the direction is clear: copper is in slow retreat.

## **AT&T California: the big legacy copper provider trying to pivot**

If you lived in California in the 1980s, your residential phone line was probably provided by Pacific Bell, which later became part of SBC, then AT&T. That was “the phone company” for a huge portion of the state.

Today, AT&T California still operates an extensive copper network, and many homes and businesses retain original POTS service. In a lot of older neighborhoods, you will see the same aerial copper drops installed 30 or 40 years ago, still in service.

### **Where AT&T still supports copper POTS**

From experience with customers across the state, copper landlines are still common in:

- Older urban and suburban neighborhoods where fiber upgrades have been partial or spotty.
- Multi-tenant buildings where the landlord never upgraded the inside wiring and still relies on copper risers.
- Rural and semi-rural pockets where DSL over copper was the only real “broadband” for decades.

Even where AT&T has deployed fiber, copper is often still in place for voice, at least for existing customers. New installations are trickier: AT&T may prefer to sell you fiber plus AT&T Phone (a VoIP product) instead of a traditional POTS line.

### **What to expect when you ask AT&T for a landline**

If you call or chat with AT&T, the first thing they will usually offer is some mix of:

- Fiber internet with AT&T Phone (VoIP)
- Wireless home phone service using the cellular network

If you ask specifically for a “traditional landline” or “plain old telephone service,” some reps will know what you mean, others will not. In some territories, AT&T still sells stand-alone POTS, including lifeline service and plans tailored for low-income or senior customers. In others, they may say the service is no longer available to new customers, even though existing POTS lines remain active.

Pricing varies by area and discounts, but a basic residential AT&T landline in California for seniors commonly runs in the 30 to 50 dollars per month range before taxes and surcharges, if you qualify for certain programs. It can be higher if you add features like Caller ID or unlimited long distance. Regulations and promotions change, so you need a current quote for your specific address.

If your goal is the cheapest landline phone service without internet, AT&T is often not the cheapest, especially once fees are included. But it is often the only original copper option in its footprint.

## **Frontier and the “other half” of California’s old copper network**

Many Californians were never AT&T customers at all. They grew up with GTE, which later became part of Verizon, and then was sold to Frontier Communications. Frontier also absorbed Citizens and some other independent territories. Collectively, Frontier holds a substantial chunk of California's legacy copper plant.

In Frontier areas, you can still find original POTS lines provided over copper, although Frontier is also pushing fiber [Phone Systems Company California](#) upgrades and VoIP. They market "Frontier Home Phone" heavily, which can be either POTS or VoIP depending on your address and infrastructure.

As with AT&T, the only way to know whether you can get a true copper line is to check by service address and to press for clarity: does the phone jack on my wall still connect to a powered central office, or will it connect through a modem, gateway, or ONT in my home?

One practical clue from the installer: if they insist your phone must plug into their router or ONT, you are not getting original copper service.

## **Rural independent carriers that still live and breathe copper**

Outside the big AT&T and Frontier footprints, California still has several independent local exchange carriers, particularly in rural and mountain regions. Many of these companies grew up serving tiny communities and remote valleys long before broadband was a buzzword.

Names you will encounter include Cal-Ore Telephone, Ponderosa Telephone, Sierra Telephone, Volcano Communications, Ducor Telephone, and a handful of others. Historically, these companies relied heavily on copper POTS and later dial-up internet. A lot of them now deploy fiber in their core network and, in some cases, all the way to the home.

Even when these rural carriers install fiber, they often continue to offer a regulated landline product, sometimes still over copper, sometimes as a highly reliable VoIP service. In the most remote locations, you may find exactly what many people are looking for: a simple analog phone line fed straight from copper pairs, backed by local technicians who still know how to work in a splice case in the rain.

The catch is geography. If you are not physically inside one of these small carrier territories, their services are not available.

## **How to verify what you actually have at your address**

Telecom marketing uses "landline," "home phone," and "voice line" in ways that confuse even seasoned technicians. Before you start comparing providers, it is worth verifying whether your current or proposed service is really an original copper landline.

Here is a simple checklist you can work through:



1. Look where your phone plugs in. If it plugs directly into a wall jack with no modem, gateway, or fiber box in between, there is a good chance you have copper POTS.
2. Find the demarcation point. On single-family homes, this is usually a gray or tan box on the outside wall where the phone company's wires meet your inside wiring. If you see bundles of thin copper pairs and no powered electronics, you are likely looking at a legacy copper feed.
3. Ask your provider explicitly. Phrase the question clearly: "Will my dial tone come directly from your central office over copper, or will it come from a modem or fiber ONT in my house?" Push for a clear answer.
4. Ask about power dependency. If they tell you your phone will not work during a power outage unless you buy a battery backup, you are dealing with VoIP or digital voice, not original POTS.
5. Check the line type with a technician. If you have a service visit, ask the technician whether your line is on a copper pair all the way back to the office, or whether you are on a remote terminal, fiber node, or fixed-wireless system that converts the line along the way.

Even among technicians, the language can be sloppy. Some will call anything on a twisted pair "copper," even if there is a digital loop carrier halfway down the road. From a user perspective, that intermediate equipment is less important than the fact that the line has power and dial tone even when your house loses electricity.

## **Who offers the cheapest stand-alone landline without internet?**

If you want the cheapest landline provider in California and you do not care whether the line runs over copper or VoIP, your options broaden. Cable companies like Comcast/Xfinity and Spectrum, as well as a long list of over-the-top VoIP services, can be less expensive than regulated POTS, especially if you already buy internet.

But that is not really the question most people ask when they say “cheapest landline phone service without internet.” They mean something like this: “Can I just have a landline without internet, that is reliable and inexpensive, ideally on copper?”

Realistically:

- Traditional POTS from AT&T or Frontier is rarely the absolute cheapest on paper once you factor in taxes and fees, but it remains the most power-independent and sometimes the most robust for 911.
- Stand-alone VoIP services (for example, those that plug into your internet router) often have low monthly rates, but they require your own broadband and power.
- Wireless home phone products, which route calls over the cellular network, sometimes hit a price sweet spot. They are not copper and may not meet all legacy alarm or medical needs, but they can be cheaper than POTS and do not require wired internet.

For low-income households and seniors, California’s Lifeline program is worth serious attention. Lifeline can substantially reduce the monthly cost of a qualifying landline or wireless plan. The details change over time, and qualifying providers can differ by service area, so it pays to review the current CPUC Lifeline information or talk to a local advocacy group that works with seniors.

## **Landlines for seniors: simplicity, reliability, and trade-offs**

Families often ask about the best landline service for senior citizens. What they usually want is not a bundle with streaming extras, but something more basic: a phone that works, is easy to hear and dial, and does not confuse the user with extra steps.

There are two dimensions: the network service and the physical phone.

On the network side, original copper POTS has real advantages for seniors:

- It usually stays up during blackouts without any special equipment.
- It delivers excellent voice quality without worrying about Wi-Fi or router placement.
- It provides a very stable connection for medical alert systems that were originally designed for POTS.

On the equipment side, the simplest landline phone for seniors is often a corded or large-button corded/cordless set, with loud ringer and straightforward controls. Many brands build “senior friendly” models with oversized keys, strong speakers, and visual ring indicators.

For some older users, the easiest phone is still a familiar desk set with a physical handset and mechanical keypad, not a smartphone with touch gestures. That does not mean seniors cannot learn smartphones. It means that for critical communication, simple and familiar often trump flashy features.

If you are helping an older relative, test the system the way they will actually use it. That includes making sure they can:

- See and dial the numbers comfortably.
- Hear the ring and the caller clearly.
- Reach emergency services reliably, even when the lights flicker.

Where original copper POTS is still available, it usually scores highest on that last point.

## **Will you lose your landline in 2027?**

There is a persistent rumor that “landlines will be phased out in 2027.” That date floats around online and in conversations at community centers, often blending news from Europe, federal rules about copper retirement in other contexts, and local anecdotes.

In California, there is no single state law or order that says all landlines will shut off in 2027. Instead, there is a slow, regulated process:

- Carriers like AT&T and Frontier ask permission to end certain obligations, retire copper in specific areas, or stop offering POTS to new customers.
- The CPUC and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) review these requests, impose conditions, and often require competitive alternatives before copper can be fully retired.
- Over time, more customers are moved to fiber, fixed wireless, or other alternatives, sometimes without being fully aware that their “landline” changed under the hood.

From a practical standpoint, you probably will not wake up in 2027 to find your copper line suddenly dead with no warning. More likely, you will be contacted well in advance with “modernization” offers and migration plans.

However, the long-term trend is unambiguous. The number of true copper POTS lines is shrinking every year, and telephone companies would like to stop maintaining the most remote and costly parts of that plant.

## **Which companies still offer a landline, even if not copper?**

If your goal is simply to have a desk phone with a traditional feel, rather than specifically preserving copper, almost every major carrier can sell you “landline style” service in California.

Major options include:

- AT&T and Frontier for either POTS (where available) or VoIP / digital voice.
- Cable companies like Comcast/Xfinity, Spectrum, and Cox, which all provide home phone services riding on their broadband networks.
- Wireless operators offering “wireless home phone” devices that convert cellular signals into a standard phone jack.
- Independent VoIP providers that plug into any existing internet connection.

These services differ more in reliability and power-outage behavior than in everyday calling features. Call blocking, voicemail, and caller ID are now common across the board. Where they diverge is the underlying dependence on your home power and broadband connection.

If you live in a part of California prone to wildfires and planned power shutoffs, that dependence becomes a critical factor.

## **Classic features: \*82, \*77, \*69 and other codes that still matter**

Many people who grew up with copper landlines remember star codes, those short commands you dial to access extra features. Some of the most common still exist on both POTS and digital voice systems, though the exact behavior can vary by carrier.

A few of the more notable ones:

- \*82 is typically used to unblock your caller ID for a single call if you usually have it blocked. You dial \*82, then the number you are calling, to show your number to that party.

- \*77 often activates anonymous call rejection on certain carriers, which blocks calls from people who have blocked their own caller ID. This feature is not universal and may not exist on all lines.
- \*69 is the classic “call return” function, which tries to dial back the last number that called you. Carriers sometimes charge for this feature or bundle it in a feature pack.

On VoIP lines, some of these codes are implemented in software and can behave a bit differently, but the idea remains the same. If you are migrating from copper to digital voice and you rely on specific star codes, confirm with your new provider which codes they support and whether they cost extra.

## **A brief look back: old phone companies and dial-up internet in California**

A lot of the anxiety around landlines comes from people who remember when the phone company was stable and monolithic.

In the 1980s, the main telephone companies in California were:

- Pacific Bell in much of the state.
- General Telephone (GTE) in significant pockets.
- A scatter of independent rural carriers, some of which still exist.

Nationally, the old phone company was AT&T, the Bell System. After its breakup in 1984, the “Baby Bells” like Pacific Telesis (Pacific Bell’s parent) and others took on regional roles. Over the following decades, mergers and rebrandings knit many of them back into the modern AT&T, Verizon, and other giants.

On the internet side, the 1990s era in California featured dial-up providers like AOL, CompuServe, Prodigy, EarthLink, and countless local ISPs. Before AOL became a household name, the “internet” for many early users was a patchwork of university networks and services like ARPANET and early UUCP networks. ARPANET, developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, is often cited as the ancestor of what became the modern internet.

Dial-up relied on those same copper phone lines, with modems squealing their way to 14.4, 28.8, then 56 kbps. In some ways, today’s desire to keep a copper line alive is rooted in that history, when a plain pair of wires was your lifeline not only for voice, but for the early web and email as well.

## **Business phone systems and copper: where it still fits**

Business phone systems once depended heavily on multiple copper lines feeding a PBX in a back room. Today, most new installations are based on VoIP, whether on-premises or cloud-hosted. Yet I still see businesses in California that retain at least one or two copper lines.

Reasons include:

- Having a truly independent backup path if the internet goes down.
- Feeding legacy alarm panels, fire systems, or elevator phones certified only for POTS.
- Meeting specific regulatory or contract requirements for critical communication paths.

If you run a small business and your integrator tells you that you “must” switch everything to VoIP, it is worth asking whether a single copper line for redundancy or compliance still makes sense. In some cases, that one line pays for itself the first time your fiber gets cut across the street.

# How to decide whether to fight for copper or move on

For some Californians, the fight to maintain an original copper landline is about more than technology. It is about continuity, perceived security, or distrust of bulky external equipment. For others, it is purely practical.

If you are on the fence, weigh three questions:

1. How critical is power-independent voice service at your location? In a city apartment with reliable power and good cellular coverage, a VoIP or wireless solution may be entirely adequate. In a remote canyon with poor cell service and frequent utility shutoffs, copper POTS can still be a lifeline.
2. Do you rely on devices certified only for POTS? Certain older medical alert systems, industrial controls, and alarm panels were designed around analog lines. Some can be adapted to VoIP or cellular, others cannot without replacement.
3. How willing are you to navigate a changing regulatory landscape? Keeping copper often involves more phone calls, more insistence with sales reps, and a readiness to adapt when your carrier eventually retires or replaces the plant. It is not a “set it and forget it” strategy forever.

For many households, a hybrid approach works best: keep one reliable line, whether copper or a carefully backed-up digital service, and supplement with cell phones and internet-based calling. The days when a single POTS line carried all of a family’s voice and data needs are gone, but the underlying copper pairs are still out there in much of California, humming quietly along.

If having that original landline matters to you, the time to verify and, if necessary, secure it is now, not the week after your provider sends a migration notice.