

New EU rules limit Internet charges for cell phone

March 1 2010, By LESLIE PATTON , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Mobile phone operators must now limit how much they charge customers for using the Internet within the European Union, after new rules went into effect Monday.

Customers have until July 1 to set a maximum monthly cost with their network, and those who do not will by default have a euro50 (\$68) limit set.

Networks will send a warning when customers use up 80 percent of their allotment. At the limit, they will be cut off.

The European Commission has pressed networks into slashing roaming charges, leading to a 35 percent drop in the average cell phone bill to about euro20 a month, according to EU data.

But until now the cost of online surfing had remained unchanged. The EU office noted that German traveler was billed euro46,000 after watching a TV show in 2009 while roaming online in France, and a British student was charged euro9,000 for a month's roaming while studying abroad.

By setting a monthly Internet limit, the European Commission hopes that "the tendency for operators will be to bring the price of surfing the Web down," EU spokesman Jonathan Todd said.

Neelie Kroes, the new EU digital issues commissioner, called the new

measure a step in "building customers' confidence to surf the Internet when traveling in Europe."

Network operators can now charge each other no more than 1 euro per megabyte for downloading. National telecoms regulators are responsible for enforcing the rules with mobile phone operators, and the EU commission will report on the issue by June 2011.

Arlene McCarthy, a British Labourite in the European Parliament who was instrumental in pushing through the roaming legislation, said "European consumers can now determine just how much they're willing to spend on their mobile while they're abroad.

"It's a shame that despite the huge numbers of complaints, mobile operators dragged their feet and we have had to use the full force of the law to get consumers a fair deal on prices," she added.

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Citation: New EU rules limit Internet charges for cell phone (2010, March 1) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-03-eu-limit-internet-cell.html>

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