



## Most cable rates are on the rise

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By ERIN MAYES

Calaveras County cable television provider Comcast will raise rates for most customers starting this month.

The 99 cent monthly increase applies to those who subscribe to standard cable, the most popular package, Comcast spokeswoman Susan Gonzales said.

Standard cable is a step above the lowest-rate basic package, costing \$10.99 a month.

According to Comcast's Web site, a new Angels Camp subscriber would pay \$41.38 per month for standard cable, which includes 23 cable networks, several local channels and community broadcasting.

Customers getting higher-priced plans, such as "Digital Platinum," will see another \$3.99 tacked on to their bills.

Gonzales said the increases reflect new services, like a higher number of customer-service representatives and a sports channel called Comcast Sports Net, which offers Sacramento Kings NBA games and other regional sports.

Angels Camp City Councilman Lee Seaton said several people have questioned whether the cable increases match inflation rates.

At a December council meeting, Seaton asked City Attorney Richard Matranga if the city has any control over cable rates.

The city granted Comcast its franchise, which means it can protect customers against outrageous rates. But it also must allow Comcast reasonable rate increases when necessary.

"The attorney (Matranga) basically said the city really did not have a feasible way of affecting the rates," City Administrator Tim Shearer said. "It's very heavily regulated and the city's ability is extremely limited."

As part of the agreement, the city gets 5 percent of Comcast's gross earnings from Angels Camp subscribers.

Tom Mitchell, Calaveras County administrative officer, said the county also receives a percentage of Comcast's gross revenue, a portion of which supports public access television.

Tuolumne County and Sonora receive only 3 percent of Comcast's profits and plan to renegotiate agreements with the company this month, Sonora City Administrator Greg Applegate said last month.

Angels Camp City Administrative Assistant Judy King said although the city received a letter from Comcast dated Dec. 28, it was unclear how much rates might increase and how the city will be affected.

"Customers will receive written notice of the change in the franchise fee by way of a bill message," the letter stated.

Calls to several Comcast subscribers revealed customers had not yet received any written notice of a rate increase.

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