

If you live in California and still rely on a traditional home phone, you have probably heard rumors that landlines are going away, or that you will be forced onto internet or wireless service by some magic year like 2027. The truth is more nuanced, and it matters a lot more if you are in a fire zone, a rural pocket, or caring for an older family member.

I work with phone and network services for a living, and I still keep an analog line at one property in the Sierra foothills. Not out of nostalgia for rotary dials, but because I have seen what actually stays up when power fails and cell towers overload. A lot of the online commentary treats “landline” as one thing, when in reality there are at least three very different technologies being lumped together.

If you want to understand which companies still offer a true landline in California, and whether it is worth keeping one, you need to untangle that first.

What “landline” means in 2026

Most people use “landline” to mean any non-cellular home phone. Technically, that umbrella covers three categories:

1. True analog POTS (Plain Old Telephone Service) over copper.
2. Digital voice over fiber or cable, but still delivered to a wall jack.
3. Pure VoIP and app-based services that rely entirely on your internet.

When regulators talk about retiring “legacy services” or “copper,” they are talking mostly about number 1: analog POTS. That is the type of line that has its own power feed from the central office, can work even when your electricity is out, and is regulated as a basic voice service by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the FCC.

The catch: many people who think they still have “a landline” are already on some flavor of internet-dependent service, usually bundled with cable or fiber. It still plugs into a phone jack, but if you follow the wire back you will eventually hit a modem, not a plain copper pair.

So when we ask which companies still offer a true landline in California, we are really asking:

- Who still offers copper POTS or its regulated successor, independent of consumer internet service?
- Where is it available, and under what conditions?

The major phone companies and how we got here

To understand the present, it helps to know what the old phone company was, especially in California.

For most of the 20th century, the Bell System dominated. In California, the local Bell company was Pacific Telephone & Telegraph, later Pacific Bell, then SBC, then rolled into what is now AT&T. On the non-Bell side, companies like GTE provided service in parts of the state; GTE lines eventually ended up with Verizon, and then spun to Frontier.

If you had a home phone in the 1980s, you were almost certainly with:

- Pacific Bell (a Bell Operating Company, part of AT&T long before the wireless brand we know today).
- GTE, or another “independent” local exchange carrier in a rural pocket.

- A very small local cooperative in remote areas, sometimes with names like Volcano Telephone or Ponderosa Telephone.

After the breakup of the Bell System in 1984, the U.S. Shifted toward competition and later towards deregulation and broadband. Some famous long-distance and dial-up names from the 1990s, such as MCI, WorldCom, and many of the old internet dial-up providers like NetZero, EarthLink, and Prodigy, rose and fell along the way. Many phone companies no longer exist as independent brands: PacBell, GTE, MCI, WorldCom, Sprint as a wireline carrier, to name a few.



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Today, when people ask about “the big 5 phone companies” or “the major telecommunications companies,” they usually mean a broader mix: AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, Comcast, and Charter Spectrum. Those are largely wireless and broadband giants, not classic local phone utilities. For actual wired home phone in California, the picture is narrower.

Who still provides a true landline in California?

In California, landline territory is divided between “incumbent local exchange carriers” (ILECs). Some are large public companies, some are small family-owned carriers that still look a lot like the 1980s phone companies.

Among the companies that still support original landlines or their regulated successors in at least part of the state:

- AT&T California (successor to Pacific Bell)
- Frontier Communications (successor to Verizon California and some GTE areas)
- A group of small independent carriers, such as:
- Consolidated / SureWest in parts of Sacramento and Roseville

- Volcano Telephone, Ponderosa, Sierra Telephone, Calaveras Telephone, Citizens Utilities, Kerman Telephone, and others in rural and mountain communities

These carriers still provide a basic voice line. In many areas, that is still copper POTS. In others, they have begun to migrate customers onto fiber or fixed wireless while maintaining a regulated “voice grade” product.

Two key realities matter for consumers:

First, in dense urban and suburban parts of California, AT&T has been pushing harder to retire copper and move lines to fiber or wireless home phone products. The CPUC reviews these moves area by area, so there is no single shutoff date. Some Bay Area neighborhoods still have available POTS; in others, new analog lines are no longer installed and only existing ones are grandfathered.

Second, many of the rural independent carriers are slower to abandon copper, partly because they do not have fiber everywhere, and partly because they are deeply tied into local emergency services. In fire country, you will still find central offices with banks of old-school line cards feeding analog loops.

If you want to know whether you can still get a true POTS line at your address in California, the only honest method is to check address availability with the local ILEC and, if the website is unclear, call and explicitly ask for “a basic measured or flat rate voice line without internet.” The pricing will not be cheap compared with what you remember from the 1990s, but it will be regulated and often eligible for lifeline discounts.

What about cable companies and VoIP “landlines”?

Cable companies like Comcast (Xfinity) and Charter Spectrum, and providers like Cox in some regions, sell what they call “home phone.” These are not true landlines in the technical sense. They are VoIP services delivered over your broadband connection and then handed off to in-home wiring.

They can sound extremely good and support traditional features like voicemail, call waiting, and star codes such as *69 (call return) or *82 (unblock caller ID for a single call). But they depend on your modem, your local power, and your internet path to the provider. When the power goes out, you are relying on a battery in your modem, if you have one installed, and on the provider keeping its local plant up.

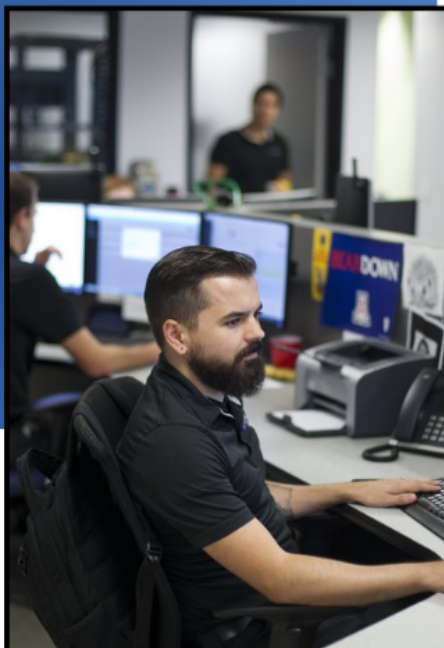
There is nothing inherently wrong with VoIP. Business phone systems have been moving to cloud-based VoIP for years, precisely because it is flexible and cheaper than maintaining PBXs and analog trunks. For a typical suburban home with decent broadband and good mobile coverage, a VoIP “landline” is often enough.

If you are trying to answer the question “Can I just have a landline without internet?” the answer, in practice, narrows your options to the true ILECs and their regulated offerings. Cable-only phone service almost always rides on some form of broadband, whether you pay for it separately or not.

How much does a landline cost now, and who is cheapest?

Prices change frequently, and carriers love promotional bundles, but there are some broad patterns in California.

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A standalone AT&T California basic landline, without long distance, often falls in the 30 to 50 dollars per month range before fees and taxes, depending on whether you choose measured or flat-rate service and whether you qualify for any senior or low-income discounts. Once you factor surcharges, it is not unusual to see bills around 45 to 70 dollars a month.

Frontier's traditional home phone pricing is in a similar ballpark, sometimes a little cheaper if you bundle with DSL or fiber, sometimes more once fees are added.

Independent rural carriers may charge more than the big boys, simply because they serve small, remote territories. On the other hand, they are often more responsive when something breaks.

Among VoIP competitors, several names come up when people ask for the cheapest landline phone service without internet. That phrase is a bit misleading, because these options require internet, but they replace the phone portion of a cable or ILEC bundle. Ooma, Vonage, MagicJack, and a host of smaller providers offer plans that can drop your monthly phone cost below 20 dollars, sometimes under 10, plus taxes. The trade-off is full dependence on your home internet and power.

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If you are purely chasing price, and you already pay for broadband, a VoIP solution is usually the cheapest landline provider alternative. If you insist on a regulated voice line that can run independently of your broadband, expect to pay more.

Landlines and seniors: simplicity vs reliability

When families ask me for advice on the best landline service for senior citizens, they are usually juggling three concerns: reliability during emergencies, ease of use, and cost.

From experience in California homes:

- A true POTS or regulated voice line from the local ILEC, paired with a very simple corded handset, is often the most intuitive setup for an older person who has used telephones since the 1950s or 60s. You pick up the receiver, you get dial tone, you dial. There are no apps, no boot time, and no confusing on-screen menus.
- The simplest landline phone for seniors is usually not a fancy multi-handset cordless system. It is a large-button, high-contrast, single-base corded or corded-plus-cordless combo, mounted in one predictable place. Brands like AT&T, Panasonic, Clarity, and VTech all make models with amplified sound and bright red "Call" or "Emergency" buttons.
- For seniors in assisted living or apartment complexes with good cellular coverage, a basic cell phone with an extremely simple interface is sometimes easier to manage than a triple-play cable bundle with a voice adapter hidden in a cabinet. The easiest phone for an elderly person is the one they actually remember to keep charged and can operate under stress.

The right answer changes if your senior relative lives in a wildfire-prone rural area where cellphone coverage drops during incidents. In those cases I tend to favor keeping a true landline, even at higher monthly cost, and pairing it with one or two backup options: a charged basic cell phone and, if internet is available, a battery-backed Wi-Fi calling device.

Will you lose your landline in 2027?

The year 2027 gets mentioned because of moves in other countries, like the UK, to retire their analog PSTN services around that timeframe. In the United States, and specifically in California, there is no single national shutoff date for landlines.

Here is what is actually happening:

Telecom carriers, including AT&T and Frontier, are gradually retiring copper in specific areas where they have already built out fiber or robust wireless alternatives. They file notices with regulators, and there are processes to ensure that basic voice service remains available in some form. The CPUC has opened proceedings on "copper retirement" and "carrier of last resort" designations, which control how fast and under what conditions analog services can be dropped.

You might see your neighborhood switch from copper to fiber, or see your analog line migrated to a digital voice service that still presents as a phone jack in your home, but runs on a fiber optical network with a battery unit. At that point, whether you consider it a "landline" becomes partly semantic.

So if you are asking "Will I lose my landline in 2027?" the honest answer for Californians is: there is no automatic statewide cutoff. Some individual copper lines will be retired, and you might be moved to fiber or a wireless home phone box. True POTS will continue to shrink year by year, especially in urban centers, but the process is gradual and regulated.

If you depend heavily on a landline, it is smarter to treat this as a five to ten year planning horizon, not a cliff.

Feature codes and old habits: *82, *77, *69 and friends

One charming thing about landlines and traditional phone systems is the set of star codes that linger from the 1980s and 1990s. Many of them still work on both analog and digital residential lines, and in some business phone systems.

A few that people commonly ask about:

*82 is used to unblock your caller ID on a per-call basis. If you have line blocking turned on so that your number normally appears as “Private” or “Anonymous,” dialing *82 before the number temporarily reveals it. This can be important when calling people who ignore blocked calls, or certain institutions that reject anonymous callers.

*77 is associated with anonymous call rejection in many areas. Activating it (and sometimes confirming with a 1) tells the system to block calls from numbers that present no caller ID. Not every carrier supports *77 exactly, and some VoIP services implement it slightly differently, so you need to check your provider’s star code list.

*69 is the classic “call return” feature. Dialing *69 attempts to ring back the last number that called you, even if you did not answer. On legacy systems, this used to incur a small per-use fee unless you had a feature package. On [Method Technologies Phone Systems Company California](#) many modern VoIP and cable phone plans it is bundled in.

Most business phone systems, including modern cloud PBXs, let administrators map these legacy star codes to internal features if users are accustomed to them. If you manage phones for an office with older staff, supporting *82 or *69 can reduce retraining friction.

Do landlines still work without internet or power?

A true copper POTS line is powered from the central office at around 48 volts DC, not from your home outlet. As long as the central office and the path out to your premises are intact, and you use a basic corded phone that does not require AC power, you will still get dial tone during a local outage. This is one of the strongest arguments for keeping a traditional landline.

Once your service moves to fiber or cable, the story changes. Those technologies require powered electronics in your home, usually an Optical Network Terminal (ONT) or cable modem. Providers can attach a battery backup unit that keeps voice service running for a limited period, often in the 4 to 24 hour range depending on the size of the battery and how old it is. After that, your “landline” goes dark along with your lights.

VoIP that runs over your own router and broadband is entirely at the mercy of your home power situation. You can mitigate this with an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) for your modem and router but it is still a chain with more links that can break.

So the answer to “Do landlines still work without internet?” is: yes, if they are true analog or regulated voice lines not tied to broadband. Digital and VoIP “landlines” rely on internet or something very close to it.

Business phone systems: where landlines still matter

Businesses in California have been migrating away from pure analog trunks for years. Yet you would be surprised how many small clinics, law offices, and municipal sites still have one or two copper lines in the mix, often tied to elevator phones, fire alarms, or legacy fax machines.

A modern business phone system can be:

- A fully hosted cloud PBX service using SIP trunks, with all phones connecting over IP.
- An on-premises PBX or key system with digital or VoIP handsets and SIP or PRI connections.
- A hybrid, with most capacity delivered over SIP but one or two analog lines as failsafe.

When people ask “What is the best business phone system?” the right answer depends less on brand and more on priorities. For some operations, high reliability and the ability to call 911 during a power cut justify the cost of

keeping a couple of analog trunks. For others, especially tech firms with robust IT staff, a well-designed hosted system over redundant fiber links is more than enough.

If you manage a critical facility, such as a medical office or a site designated as an emergency shelter, check local requirements. Certain fire and elevator codes still refer explicitly to dedicated analog lines, although vendors increasingly support digital or cellular alternatives with the right certifications.

How to decide whether to keep or drop a landline

Here is a simple decision framework I use when helping California households decide whether to maintain a landline. It applies whether you are on copper or a digital voice line.

1. Check your cell coverage in realistic conditions. Go through the house with your actual everyday phone at different times of day. Try calling 911 or the local non-emergency line (do not tie up emergency dispatch; ask a friend to stand by if you test 911). If you are in a wildfire area, think about what happened during previous incidents when towers were congested.
2. Look at your power outage history. If you are in a neighborhood where outages are rare and short, a VoIP line with a decent battery backup might be enough. If you routinely see 8 to 24 hour outages, a true POTS line or at least a very carefully backed up fiber voice line is worth serious thought.
3. Consider who depends on the line. If you have older relatives who are uncomfortable with smartphones, or if your babysitter or kids are at home without you at times, having a simple, always-there dial tone is more than nostalgia. It is a safety net when a charger goes missing or a phone dies.
4. Factor in cost and redundancy. If you already pay for robust cellular on multiple lines, a traditional landline might be redundant, especially in a city. On the other hand, if your monthly budget has room, a 40 to 60 dollar bill for a true fallback communication path is not outrageous insurance.
5. Ask your provider what technology you actually have. Many Californians are convinced they still have "old copper" when they have been migrated to fiber without realizing it. The marketing materials do not always highlight that. Once you know whether your line is analog POTS, digital voice over fiber, or VoIP over cable, you can make a more informed choice about battery backup and alternatives.

Where this is heading over the next decade

No one in the industry believes that copper POTS will be a mainstream mass-market product fifteen years from now. The economics and maintenance burden are just too heavy. The wires themselves are aging, technicians who truly understand outside plant are retiring, and the revenue from voice service alone does not justify endless upkeep.

Yet that does not mean fixed voice will disappear. Instead, we will see:

- Ongoing migration from copper to fiber or fixed wireless in California, with regulators insisting on some minimum level of voice reliability and 911 accessibility.
- Increased pressure on carriers to provide robust battery solutions as analog lines vanish, especially in wildfire and earthquake zones where the dark side of the internet and overreliance on apps becomes obvious during disasters.
- A growing gap between households that are comfortable relying entirely on smartphones and households that still need a physical, shared phone, often for accessibility reasons.

If you live in California and still have a true landline, you are not wrong to keep it, especially if you are in a rural or fire-prone area. Just do it with your eyes open. Know who your provider is, what technology they are using, and what their plans are for your neighborhood. Treat your landline as one piece of a broader communications plan that includes cellular, possibly a VoIP backup, and realistic power contingencies.

The phone system is no longer a single, monolithic “Ma Bell” network. It is a patchwork of mobile towers, fiber trenches, coaxial plant, and, in some pockets, those familiar copper pairs that have been hanging on the pole outside your house since the 1970s. Whether you keep a landline in California comes down to how much you value that last thread of old-fashioned dial tone in an increasingly wireless world.