

Comcast shut off Internet to hundreds, saying they were illegally connected

reader comments

232 with 109 posters participating

Share this story

Comcast says that a broadband reseller illegally sold Comcast Internet service in residential buildings in the Denver area and has terminated the connections to those buildings.

As reported by Denver7 this week, the shutoff affected hundreds of people who live in buildings serviced by AlphaWiFi, “which installs and services Internet in approximately 90 apartment buildings across Denver.” The shutoff came as a surprise to residents, including Kaley Warren, who has been working at home during the pandemic.

“It is my entire lifeline,” said Warren, who said that without warning last Friday, her Internet service disappeared. “I felt lost. It was truly the first time during the pandemic that I... had the feeling of ‘What am I supposed to do?’”

When contacted by Ars, a Comcast spokesperson said that “AlphaWiFi is under a standard commercial agreement which expressly prohibits the resale of Comcast services.” Comcast did not answer questions about how many people were affected and when they will get service restored, but it did provide us with the same statement it previously gave to Denver7, which says:

Comcast learned that AlphaWiFi has been improperly reselling Comcast's Internet services to individual residential customers throughout the Denver area. We take the unauthorized resale of our services very seriously as it violates our contracts and the law, and can negatively affect services provided to customers across our network. We notified AlphaWiFi well in advance that its service would be terminated and asked that they notify impacted users of the need to transition their services. We also provided multiple advance notices to the residents we believed would be affected and have been working to transition those who are interested to our residential services. We're committed to delivering the best experience and remain available to assist those impacted.

AlphaWiFi blames Comcast

AlphaWiFi President Keith Lawton told Denver7 that "we absolutely dispute Comcast's take on this matter. Comcast knew our business plan, and we made it clear to Comcast that despite our disagreement, we wanted to work with them in order to transition these accounts with no disruption. Unfortunately for these customers, Comcast opted to cancel their service instead of working with us and unnecessarily impacted these consumers. AlphaWiFi continues to work diligently to support our customers and get their Internet access reinstated."

The statement doesn't explain AlphaWiFi's theory on why it can resell Comcast service. We contacted AlphaWiFi yesterday, asking for details on the resale question, for details on how many buildings and residents lost service, and for an update on when people will be reconnected. We'll update this article if we get a response.

Like hundreds of other ISPs, Comcast signed a Federal Communications Commission pledge to keep Internet users connected during the pandemic. But the pledge expired at the

end of June, and it covered individual users who were unable to pay bills rather than cases of illegal resales, so it may not have applied to the Denver situation anyway.

The shutoff apparently also caught a building management company by surprise. RIO Properties, which manages dozens of buildings, including the one where Warren lives, told residents in an email, "We apologize and did not know in advance this was going to happen," according to Denver7. We contacted RIO yesterday and will update this article if we get a response.

Heidi Chapman, who also lost service, called the shutoff during a pandemic "heartless," saying people could lose their jobs when they don't have Internet access. "[S]he knew nothing about the impending Internet shutdown until she lost Internet service, and it could be up to a month before a deal with another Internet provider," Denver7 wrote. "She was left scrambling to add a hotspot to her phone."

<https://arstechnica.com/?p=1707732>