

New code coming to 520

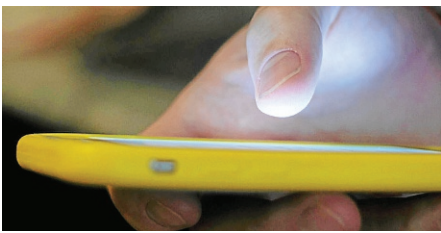
HOWARD FISCHER
Capitol Media Services

PHOENIX — Sometime in the next five years or so, some Southern Arizona residents are going to find out that their new neighbors have a different area code.

But no current customer will get a new number.

All this is occurring because, mathematically speaking, the number of numbers available will run out in 2030 in the area that covers everything from Casa Grande and Florence through Tucson, west to the Pima County line and then south and east through Nogales, Sierra Vista and Douglas to the state line.

So the North American Numbering Plan Administrator will have to assign a new code.



JENNY KANE, ASSOCIATED PRESS

In about five year's state officials expect to issue a new area code for Southern Arizona, but the process will differ from previous years.

The "why" of all this is more complex. "I think you've just seen technology explode and the ability to communicate with cell phones," said Doug Clark. He's

the executive director of the Arizona Corporation Commission, which is involved in ensuring there are sufficient phone numbers available in the state.

"A lot of children above the age of 10 have a cell phone," Clark said, each with its own unique number. "My family has six cell phones!"

But that, he said, is just part of the problem. And the rest? Robocallers and spam callers.

"They can request a large pot of numbers so they can, for lack of a better word, disguise that they're calling from Apache Junction or Casa Grande or some other location other than this is an 888 number, so it's a spam call," Clark said.

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U.S. seizes another tanker

BY KONSTANTIN TOROPIN AND AAMER MADHANI
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. forces on Saturday stopped an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela for the second time in less than two weeks as President Donald Trump continues to ramp up pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

The pre-dawn operation came days after Trump announced a "blockade" of all sanctioned oil tankers coming in and out of the South American country and follows the Dec. 10 seizure by American forces of an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem confirmed that the U.S. Coast Guard with help from the Defense Department stopped the oil tanker that was last docked in Venezuela. She also posted on social media an unclassified video of a U.S. helicopter landing personnel on a vessel called Centuries.

A crude oil tanker flying under the flag of Panama operates under the name and was recently spotted near the Venezuelan coast, according to MarineTraffic, a project that tracks the movement of vessels around the globe using publicly available data. It was not immediately clear if the vessel was under U.S. sanctions.

"The United States will continue to pursue the illicit movement of sanctioned oil that is used to fund narco terrorism in the region," Noem wrote on X. "We will find you, and we will stop you."

The action was a "consented boarding," with the tanker stopping voluntarily and allowing U.S. forces to board it, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The reasoning for the seizure of the Centuries is far less clear than it was with the first tanker, the Skipper, which was known to be part of a shadow fleet of tankers that operates on the fringes of the law to move sanctioned cargo and was not even flying a nation's flag when it was seized by the U.S. Coast Guard.

White House Deputy Press Secretary Anna Kelly claimed in an online post Saturday that the Centuries was a similarly "falsely flagged vessel operating as part of the Venezuelan shadow fleet to traffic stolen oil" and that the oil it was carrying was sanctioned.

However, Dr. Salvatore Mercogliano, a maritime historian and merchant shipping expert at Campbell University, said that according to several shipping industry databases, the Centuries appeared to be operating legally.

"Everything indicates that she is a

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SPARKLE IN THE DESERT



KELLY PRESNELL PHOTOS, ARIZONA DAILY STAR

ABOVE: Alex Lopez, making the rounds as a pint-sized St. Nick, takes a minute to examine some of the holiday decorations at Tohono Chul's Holiday Nights. Lopez and his family were among those taking advantage of the popular event, which wrapped up Sunday.

RIGHT: A visitor grabs some cellphone images of the bright lights in the cactus courtyard during the final days of Tohono Chul's Holiday Nights.



Despite Trump's claims, extent of SNAP fraud unclear

GEOFF MULVIHILL
Associated Press

President Donald Trump's administration is talking tough about SNAP, saying the government's biggest food aid program is riddled with fraud that must be stopped.

His appointees are looking at Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program from an enforcement perspective, seeing fraud as a major and expensive problem, perpetrated by organized criminal organizations, individual recipients and retailers willing to break the law for profit.

"We know there are instances of fraud committed by our friends and neighbors, but also transnational crime rings," Jennifer Tiller, a senior adviser to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, said in an interview.

Some experts agree that SNAP fraud is a major problem. But there is

little publicly available data showing the extent of it, and others who study the program are skeptical about the scale.

"If you're spending \$100 billion on anything, you're going to have some leakage," said Christopher Bosso, a professor of public policy and politics at Northeastern University who published a book on SNAP.

Of the \$100 billion spent on SNAP a year, about \$94 billion goes to benefits and the rest to administrative costs.

About 42 million people — or 1 in 8 Americans — receive SNAP benefits averaging about \$190 per person per month. The number of recipients is in the same ballpark as the number of people in poverty — 36 million by the traditional measure and 43 million under a more nuanced one also used by the federal government.

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Kansas tribe ditches contract with ICE

HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH AND JOSHUA GOODMAN
Associated Press

A Kansas tribe said it walked away from a nearly \$30 million federal contract to come up with preliminary designs for immigrant detention centers after facing a wave of online criticism.

The Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation's announcement this week came just over a week after the economic development leaders who brokered the deal with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement were fired.

With some Native Americans swept up and detained in recent ICE raids, the deal was derided online as "disgusting" and "cruel." Many in Indian Country also questioned how a tribe whose own ancestors were uprooted two centuries ago from the Great Lakes region and corralled on a reservation south of Topeka

could participate in the Trump administration's mass deportation efforts.

Tribal Chairman Joseph "Zeke" Rupnick nodded to the historic issues last week in a video address that called reservations "the government's first attempts at detention centers." In an update Wednesday, he announced that he was "happy to share that our Nation has successfully exited all third-party related interests affiliated with ICE."

The Prairie Band Potawatomi has a range of businesses that provide health care management staffing, general contracting and even interior design. And Rupnick said in his latest address that tribal officials plan to meet in January about how to ensure "economic interests do not come into conflict with our values in the future."

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