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For the second time in recent weeks, Verizon has agreed to repair aging and buzz-prone copper phone lines.

This time in Pennsylvania.

The telecom giant will repair the worst of its legacy copper network in areas without FiOS and replace 15,000 unsightly and dangerous “double poles” on Pennsylvania roadsides, according to the deal between the company and the company’s Pennsylvania unionized workers who are part of the Communications Workers of America.

Double poles are damaged poles left after replacement, many times strapped to new poles. The poles also could perilously dangle between existing poles with the telephone wires still attached to them.

Verizon, however, rejected calls from the union to expand FiOS into Pennsylvania areas without it.

Verizon reached a similar deal in May with 17 South Jersey towns that complained of rundown copper lines leading to phone outages and buzzing on the line. Verizon said it would respond more quickly in South Jersey to reports of phone outages — within 48 hours — and expand FiOS to four small municipalities, but not the whole 17-town area. FiOS is Verizon’s branded high-speed internet and TV service that uses fiber-optic transmission lines, an upgrade from copper.

The Pennsylvania pact could lead to phone improvements in the Philadelphia-area exurbs in Chester and Bucks Counties and rural parts of Pennsylvania, an official said.

The Pennsylvania settlement concludes a long-running dispute between Verizon and its Pennsylvania workers who claimed that the rundown copper wires didn’t reliably serve voice or DSL internet customers, and posed safety risks for the public and employees. The union contends that Verizon has starved its legacy copper lines of repair and maintenance as it put billions of dollars into FiOS and its wireless network, leaving many Verizon customers with a substandard network.

Verizon had no comment on the pact. The company did not admit wrongdoing. The settlement was filed with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission on Friday but does not need the commission’s approval.

The Communications Workers of America filed the petition with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission in late 2015, with photos of sagging or repeatedly patched copper wires, and many double poles on roadsides. The Pennsylvania Office of Consumer Advocate and the state’s Small Business Advocate joined the petition.

Edward Mooney, vice president for District 2-13 for the Communications Workers of America in Philadelphia, said the union was satisfied with the agreement because Verizon “acknowledged that it had problems outside of the FiOS areas.” He added that “I’m not sure this will create additional jobs, but it will surely engage workers to make these improvements.”

As part of the three-year agreement, Verizon will evaluate all requests in 2015 and 2016 for phone-line replacements in Pennsylvania within two months. Verizon will replace those lines it deems unsafe or unreliable within 18 months.

Verizon also will select 30 “wire centers” — or broad areas where it serves phone and DSL customers through the centralized wire centers — for remediation. In addition, Verizon will implement a “plant pride” program for workers to report damage-plagued copper lines.

Consumers with complaints can call 1-800-692-7380 in Pennsylvania and 1-800-624-0241 in New Jersey. — *Philadelphia Inquirer*

