

Wells Fargo: Millions of Customers Might be Due Refund for Faulty Checking Charges

Wells Fargo (WFC) charged customers a monthly service fee to maintain a checking account that many customers assumed was free and the bank is mulling how to respond to people who feel cheated, according to the bank and sources familiar with the accounts.

Wells Fargo charges customers \$10 a month to maintain two popular checking accounts—Everyday Checking and Opportunity Checking—but the bank waives the fee when customers conduct at least ten transactions in a month.

ATM withdrawals do not count towards the ten-transaction tally but for years Wells Fargo relied on bank employees to explain that policy verbally rather than put it plainly in writing, according to bank documents seen by *The Capitol Forum*, current and former employees.

Wells Fargo said in May that a personal finance product was faulty and that some customers might be due a refund. The bank did not explain at the time that the faulty accounts were Everyday Checking and Opportunity Checking—the two most-popular checking accounts that are used by millions of customers.

Wells Fargo declined to say how many accounts might be affected or how the bank would decide which customers should expect money back. But Wells Fargo said it can be trusted to find customers who were wrongly charged and that it will return what is due.

“It’s the right thing to do for our customers, and supports our work to build customer relationships that last a lifetime,” Wells Fargo said in a prepared statement.

Wells Fargo said about 10 percent of customers do not meet one of the conditions for free checking, but the bank declined to say how many personal checking accounts there are. The bank also declined to say what it expects to pay to make things right with customers.

If Wells Fargo manages more than 20 million accounts—as two sources familiar with the bank have told *The Capitol Forum*—then fixing the problem might involve a review of many millions of instances when customers were charged to maintain their checking account in recent years.

Two federal regulators have sanctioned Wells Fargo in recent years over consumer abuse but the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) declined to comment on the checking account issue raised by the bank.

Wells Fargo's effort to deal with faulty checking accounts comes nearly three years after the bank was rocked by a phony accounts scandal that has damaged the bank's reputation and drawn scrutiny from regulators that persists today.

Wells Fargo cannot grow its business due to Federal Reserve sanctions enacted in February 2018 and continued scandal could mean that penalty stays in place for some time.

Common complaint. Wells Fargo charges vendors a small fee when bank customers use their debit card for purchases.

Beginning in April 2013, Opportunity Checking customers nationwide got free checking if they conducted at least ten debit card transactions a month, the bank said. The same promotion applied to Everyday Checking customers beginning in September 2014.

ATM withdrawals were never credited towards a Wells Fargo customer's ten-transaction tally, but the rules were not always clear.

Wells Fargo explains its checking account policies in a pamphlet that [now says plainly](#) that "any transaction at an ATM" does not count towards the free-checking tally.

In past years, Wells Fargo was [not so explicit](#) and simply said that debit card purchases were part of the free-checking promotion.

Wells Fargo branch employees were expected to verbally explain that ATM withdrawals were not purchases under the free-checking program, but oversight was lax, said several current and former workers.

"We got a few complaints every week about this," said an employee at a California branch.

Wells Fargo branch employees could waive the monthly fee but there was no consistent policy on when that should happen, said one branch employee. "If the customer was irate, we might waive the fee."

While other national banks have free-checking promotions none has a program that matches the Wells Fargo campaign.

Since early 2018, Wells Fargo customers have received personal alerts that track how close they are to the ten-transaction threshold for free checking, said a bank spokesman.