



# Don't Become a Victim of Fraud: How to Protect Yourself from Phone Scams

January 2013

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) wants you to be aware of the following phone scams and other utility scams and know what steps to take to protect yourselves.

- **“Slamming” and “Cramming”:** “Slamming” is the practice of switching your long-distance phone company without your permission. Cramming is being billed for items or services on your phone bill that you did not authorize.

To ensure that slamming and cramming do not happen to you, carefully check your phone bill(s) each month. When you switch to a different phone company, either the new phone company will send you a new bill or its charges will appear on your local phone bill.

**It is good practice to check ALL your monthly utility bills to ensure that the charges are accurate.**

If you have fallen victim to these scams, contact your local and/or long-distance phone company(ies) immediately. Make sure you are not charged to switch back to your original phone company(ies). You will not be charged for the calls, services, and/or products that you did not authorize on your phone bill; however, you will need to pay the rest of your bill to ensure that service is not disconnected due to non-payment.

- **\*72 Scam:** Scammers will call you on your landline home phone pretending to be with law enforcement or a hospital and tell you that a member of your family has been hurt in an accident and that you need to call the officer/doctor as soon as possible. They will tell you to call them back by dialing \*72 + an area code and seven-digit phone number. **Do not return the call.**

By dialing \*72 prior to the area code and phone number, you may activate the call-forwarding feature on your home phone. This means that all calls placed to your home phone number will be automatically forwarded to the phone number the scammer gave you. When that happens, you may be billed for charges, including long-distance and collect calls, each time calls are forwarded to the scammer's number. **This will continue until you deactivate the call-forwarding feature.** Depending on which phone company you have, dialing \*73 may turn off the call-forwarding feature. If you are unsure if you subscribe to the call-forwarding feature, call your phone company to check.

- **809 Scam (also 284, 649, and 876):** Scammers will leave an alarming message on your home phone answering machine, pager, or email, telling you that a family member has been in an accident and that you need to call them back as soon as possible. They will tell you to call them back by dialing 809 (or 284, 649, and 876) followed by a seven-digit phone number. **Do not return the call.**

By calling 809 (or 284, 649, and 876) plus the phone number, you may be charged with high international calling rates. These numbers are international pay-per-call phone numbers.



Even if you quickly hang up, you may still be charged with the high rates and the pay-per-call service fee as you are calling outside of the U.S., typically in Canada or the Caribbean.

Wireless consumers are now receiving similar calls from phone numbers with three-digit area codes that appear to be domestic, but are actually associated with international pay-per-call phone numbers.

- **“Grandparents Scam”**: Scammers will call and either pretend to be your grandchild (or other relative) or tell you that your grandchild (or other relative) has been jailed (typically, they will tell you it’s a jail outside of the U.S.). They will ask you to wire thousands of dollars to bail them out.

Or, scammers will call and tell you that your grandchild (or other relative) has been involved in a terrible accident and that you will need to wire thousands of dollars to a hospital (they will tell you it’s a hospital outside of the U.S.) to pay for emergency treatment.

Also, scammers will call and pretend to be your grandchild (or other relative) stranded in another country and that they need you to wire money to pay custom fees. Scammers will ask you to wire money through services such as Western Union and MoneyGram because they can pick it up quickly and they often use a fake identification so they cannot be traced.

If you get a call from someone claiming to be your grandchild (or other relative) asking for financial help, check to confirm that it’s legitimate before you send any money. Contact the person who they claim to be directly via the contact method you’ve most used in the past.

If you can’t reach that person, contact another relative. **Do not send money unless you confirm the real person you know is in need.**

If you have already wired money, contact the money transfer service immediately to report the scam. If the money has not been picked up yet, you can try to retrieve it.

- **Robocalls and Telemarketing Phone Calls**: These are unsolicited phone calls to your home (landline) and/or cell phones that use a computerized autodialer to deliver a pre-recorded message. Telephone solicitations are phone calls that act as advertisements. These do not include calls or messages placed with your permission, by or on behalf of a tax-exempt, non-profit organization, or from a person or organization with which you have an established business relationship. The Telephone Consumer Protection Act places limits on these types of unsolicited calls.

You can register your home (landline) phone number(s) or cell phone number(s) on the Federal Communication Commission’s national Do-Not-Call list by phone or by Internet at no cost.

How to register via phone, call the Federal Communications Commission:

**Call:**                **888-382-1222 (voice)**

**866-290-4236 (TTY)**

**Visit:**                [www.donotcall.org](http://www.donotcall.org)



Once you have placed your phone number(s) on the national Do-Not-Call list, callers are prohibited from making telephone solicitations to those numbers. **Your number(s) will remain on the national Do-Not-Call list until you remove them or discontinue service.** You do not need to re-register phone numbers.

If you continue to receive unsolicited telemarketing calls and it has been at least 31 days since you registered your phone number(s), you can file a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission's Consumer Center:

**Call:** 888-CALL-FCC (888-225-5322) voice  
888-TELL FCC (888-835-5322) TTY  
**Fax:** 866-418-0232  
**Write:** Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer and Government Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
445 12<sup>th</sup> St., SW  
Washington, DC 20554

- **Beware of Fake Utility Workers:** Scam artists will pose as utility workers to try to gain access into your home. If someone is at your front door and/or on the phone claiming to be a utility representative, verify that he or she is in fact a utility worker by asking for company identification and calling the utility company to confirm the representative's employment with the company. You can find the utility's phone number on your latest monthly utility bill, the Internet, or in the phone book.

If the individual refuses to show identification or if anything appears to be out of the ordinary, **do not open the door** and/or **end the phone call** and report the incident to the utility company that the person is claiming to represent.

If any of these scams happen to you, call your phone company and/or appropriate utility company and report the incident(s) to the **CPUC's Consumer Affairs Branch:**

**Call:** 800-649-7570  
**Visit:** [www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUC/CEC/e\\_complaint/](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUC/CEC/e_complaint/)  
**Write:** CPUC Consumer Affairs Branch  
505 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco, CA 94102

Remember that you are the CPUC's eyes and ears of the community. It is strongly encouraged that you report this fraudulent activity to the CPUC's Consumer Affairs Branch. Your actions today may help prevent fellow residents from becoming victims tomorrow!

For further information contact the CPUC's Business & Community Outreach team!

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