

Caller ID and Spoofing

Caller Identification, or “Caller ID,” allows you to identify a caller before you answer your telephone. It is sometimes offered as an optional service by landline and wireless telephone companies, and may cost an additional monthly fee (fees vary by phone company). A caller’s number and/or name are displayed on your phone (if your phone has this feature). It is also possible to buy an external display unit, and some phone and cable companies that provide phone service even offer widgets that allow you to see caller ID displayed on your TV or computer screen.

Caller ID service, however, is susceptible to fraud. Using a practice known as “caller ID spoofing,” callers can deliberately falsify the telephone number and/or name relayed as the Caller ID information to disguise the identity of the calling party. For example, identity thieves who want to collect sensitive information such as your bank account or other financial account numbers, your social security number, your date of birth or your mother’s maiden name, sometimes use caller ID spoofing to make it appear as though they are calling from your bank, credit card company, or even a government agency.

Truth in Caller ID Act of 2009

The Truth in Caller ID Act of 2009, which was signed into law Dec. 22, 2010, prohibits caller ID spoofing for the purposes of defrauding or otherwise causing harm. In June 2010, the Federal Communications Commission adopted rules implementing the Truth in Caller ID Act.

FCC Rules

- Prohibit any person or entity from transmitting misleading or inaccurate caller ID information with the intent to defraud, cause harm, or wrongfully obtain anything of value.
- Subject violators to a penalty of up to \$10,000 for each violation of the rules.
- Exempt authorized activities by law enforcement agencies and situations where courts have authorized caller ID manipulation to occur.

Tips for Consumers

- Don’t give out personal information in response to an incoming call. Identity thieves are clever – they often pose as representatives of banks, credit card companies, creditors, or government agencies to get people to reveal their account numbers, Social Security numbers, mother’s maiden names, passwords and other identifying information.
- If you get an inquiry from a company or government agency seeking personal information, don’t provide it. Instead, hang up and call the phone number on your account statement, in the phone book, or on the company’s or government agency’s website to find out if the entity that supposedly called you actually needs the requested information from you.
- Please let the FCC know about ID spoofers by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC or filing a complaint at www.fcc.gov/complaints.

FCC Caller ID Rules for Telemarketers

Even before passage of the Truth in Caller ID Act, FCC rules required telemarketers to pass accurate caller ID information. FCC rules specifically require that a telemarketer:

- Transmit or display its telephone number or the telephone number of the seller on whose behalf the telemarketer is calling, and, if possible, its name or the name and telephone number of the company for which it is selling products or services.
- Display a telephone number that you can call during regular business hours to ask to no longer be called. This rule applies even to companies that already have an established business relationship with you.

For violations of these rules, the FCC can seek a monetary fine. If the violator is not an FCC licensee, the FCC must first issue a warning and the telemarketer may be fined only for violations committed after the warning.

Rules for Blocking and Unblocking Your Telephone Number

The FCC's Caller ID rules protect the privacy of the person calling by requiring telephone companies to make available free, simple and uniform per-line blocking and unblocking procedures. These rules give you the choice of delivering or blocking your telephone number for any interstate (between states) call you make. (The FCC does not regulate blocking and unblocking of intrastate calls.)

- **Per-call blocking** – To block your phone number and name from appearing on a recipient's Caller ID unit on a single phone call, dial *67 before dialing the phone number. Your number will not be sent to the other party. You must redial *67 each time you place a new call.
- **Per-line blocking** – Some states allow customers to select per-line blocking. With this option, your telephone number will be blocked for every call you make on a specific line – unless you use the per-line unblocking option. If you use per-line blocking and want your number to be transmitted to the called party, dial *82 before you dial the number you are calling. You must redial *82 each time you place a call.
- **Blocking Your Name** – Some Caller ID services also transmit the name of the calling party. If you request that your phone number be concealed, FCC rules require that a telephone company also conceal your name.
- **800 number/toll free calls** – When you dial a toll free number the party you call is able to identify your telephone number using a telephone network technology called Automatic Number Identification (ANI). Requesting that your caller ID be blocked when you call 800, 888, 877, 866, and 855 numbers may not prevent the people who answer such calls from seeing your phone number and name. FCC rules, however, prevent parties that are assigned toll free numbers from reusing or selling the telephone numbers identified through ANI without the subscriber's consent.
- **Emergency Calls** – Telephone companies may transmit numbers of subscribers requesting privacy if the call is to a public agency's emergency telephone line or in conjunction with 911 or poison control services.

Blocking Tips for Consumers

Look before you dial:

- To block your telephone number for any call, dial *67 before dialing the telephone number.
- To unblock your number for any call (if you have a blocked line), dial *82 before dialing the telephone number.

If you have caller ID and receive a call from a telemarketer without the required caller ID information, if you suspect that Caller ID information has been falsified, or you think the rules for protecting the privacy of your telephone number have been violated, you can file a complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint.

How to File a Complaint with the FCC

You must include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible. To file a complaint, please visit www.fcc.gov/complaints. You can also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) for TTY; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554.

###

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print or audio), please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an email to FCC504@fcc.gov.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

Last Reviewed October 29, 2014

