



How to Avoid Getting SLAMMED

It's illegal. It's deceptive. It's costly. But getting "slammed" (having your telephone carrier switched without your permission) is a common occurrence.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations state that it is illegal for a company to switch your long-distance service without a signed (or verbal and verified by a third party) authorization from you.

To avoid getting slammed, consumers must first understand how it happens.

How it happens

Scenario #1: A telemarketer may call and try to switch you to a different telephone carrier. Even though you say "no," there is a possibility that the person will switch you anyway.

Scenario #2: A small company buys telephone service from a larger carrier at wholesale rates and then resells this service at a retail rate. The small company may try to confuse customers by associating itself with the large carrier's name with their own service and rates.

Scenario #3: Entering a contest may give you a chance to win a car or trip, or even the surprise (in fine print) of a new telephone carrier as well.

Various other slamming scenarios exist, including consumers receiving, signing and cashing a check that signs them up for a new telephone carrier.

How to avoid it

You are already on the right track to avoiding a "slam" by educating yourself. Simply being aware that slamming can occur is important. Always read the fine print to find out exactly what it is you are signing up for. In addition, be certain to:

- **Know who your current long-distance**



Long-distance telephone companies want your business.

And they may do just about anything to get it.

carrier is. Call your local telephone company to find out or dial 1-700-555-4141 and a recording will tell you.

- **Keep an eye on your telephone bills** to see if your carrier changes or if the charges for your long-distance calls increase significantly. The FCC and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) rules require carrier changes to be "clearly and conspicuously" indicated on all telephone bills and require carriers to send a "welcome package" to new customers within 10 days.

- **Call your local telephone company and request a "carrier freeze."** Currently, your local company will switch your long distance service whenever a long-distance carrier makes a request. A carrier freeze (sometimes called a "PIC" freeze) is currently the only way to block a switch without your direct consent.

- If after switching long-distance carriers you have not received a bill from the new carrier within 30 days, contact your local telephone company to check your account.

If you have been slammed

Call your local telephone company immediately and notify the customer service representative that you did not authorize the switching of your service and ask to be returned to your original carrier. You should tell your local carrier that you want all "change of carrier charges" (PIC change charges) removed from your bill.

If the slamming involves long-distance service, also call your long-distance company and make them aware of the slamming. Ask the company to make sure your account is in order and that you will not be penalized with charges resulting from being

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switched.

Once a slamming complaint has been verified by the FCC or the PUCO, consumers who paid the unauthorized carrier are guaranteed compensation.

In situations where consumers who have been slammed **have paid** the unauthorized carrier, the rules require the unauthorized carrier to pay 150 percent of all charges to your authorized carrier, which in turn is responsible for reimbursing you 50 percent of what you paid. For example, if you paid the unauthorized carrier \$50, the unauthorized carrier would be required to pay your authorized carrier \$75. Then your

SWITCH TIP:
Be aware that you can voluntarily switch your long-distance carrier at any time for a nominal fee. Some carriers, if you ask, will waive this fee in order to get you as a customer.

authorized carrier would pay you \$25.

Consumers who have been slammed and have **not paid** the unauthorized carrier, will not be responsible to pay for service for up to 30 days after the slam occurred.

If you think you've been slammed, you can call:

OCC 1-877-742-5622 (toll free)

FCC 1-888-225-5322 (toll free)

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts. The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues and resolves complaints from individuals. To receive utility information, brochures, schedule a presentation or file a utility complaint, residential consumers may call 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free in Ohio or visit the OCC Web site at www.pickocc.org.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.

For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel:

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