

Be Alert for “Spoofed” Local Phone Numbers



The Office of the
Minnesota Attorney General
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity, safety, and respect

As people try to screen unwanted phone calls, unscrupulous telemarketers and scam artists have looked for new ways to lure people to answer calls. One increasingly common technique scam artists use is to falsify or “spoof” their caller ID information with local phone numbers or information to make it look like the calls are coming from a nearby person or business. While the caller’s information may falsely appear local, the calls are often placed by scam artists who are located outside the state or country. It could happen like this:

“Jake” was watching his favorite TV show when his phone rang. He checked his caller ID and saw “Local Call,” along with a phone number that had the same area code as his home number. Because of this, Jake thought the call was from a local caller. After he answered the call, however, he heard a recording that offered to lower his credit card interest rate. Jake hung up and reported the call to the federal authorities.

How It Works

Spoofing technology allows scam artists to trick caller ID devices into displaying false information. Scam artists realize many people no longer answer calls from phone numbers with unfamiliar area codes or that display no caller ID information, or “unknown,” on their caller ID device. By spoofing local phone numbers or information into caller ID devices, scam artists hope their calls will appear familiar enough to entice the recipient into answering. For example, scam artists might spoof “Minnesota Call” or a telephone number that is only a few digits away from the call recipient’s phone number. You might even see your own name and phone number displayed on your caller ID device by these callers.

Scam artists who use spoofing technology perpetrate a wide range of scams designed to steal money or personal information. Accordingly, it is important to be cautious of unsolicited calls from unknown callers—even if their caller ID information appears local. You should never provide personal or financial information to unknown callers.

What You Can Do

Answering spoofed calls alerts the scam artist that your phone number is active and will likely only lead to more unwanted calls. Scam artists who use spoofing technology are usually attempting to commit crimes, and criminal callers usually ignore established means of stopping unwanted calls, such as the National Do Not Call Registry. If you receive these calls, you may wish to:

- **Hang up.** As soon as you recognize the call is a scam or the caller is not a person or organization you know, end the call. It is not rude to hang up on someone trying to scam you. Remember “Minnesota Nice” does not apply to scammers.
- **Contact your phone company.** Your phone company may offer calling features that block unwanted calls, such as selective ringing, selective call acceptance, and selective call blocking. Some of these features may also be available on your phone for no cost.

Reporting Spoofed Calls

If you received a “spoofed” call, you should report it to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Federal Trade Commission. These agencies have the authority to enforce federal laws that regulate caller ID spoofing, autodialed calls, and interstate fraud perpetrated over the phone. You may contact these agencies as follows:

Federal Communications Commission

Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20554
(888) 225-5322
www.fcc.gov/complaints

Federal Trade Commission

Consumer Response Center
600 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20580
(877) 382-4357
TTY: (866) 653-4261
www.reportfraud.ftc.gov

The FCC has adopted a rule clarification which authorizes phone companies to offer services that block unwanted calls and text messages to their customers. You may wish to contact your phone company to determine whether it provides any of these services.

If you lost money to a criminal scam, you should report the matter to your local and federal law enforcement officials. These agencies have the authority to investigate criminal acts.

For more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison as follows:

Office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison

445 Minnesota Street, Suite 1400
St. Paul, MN 55101
(651) 296-3353 (Twin Cities Calling Area)
(800) 657-3787 (Outside the Twin Cities)
(800) 627-3529 (Minnesota Relay)
www.ag.state.mn.us