



North Carolina Telecommunications Industry Association

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N.C. Telephone Companies Offer Tips To Help Customers Avoid Slamming, Cramming

SANFORD, N.C. – Con artists and unscrupulous vendors continue targeting local telephone customers with slamming and cramming schemes. Slamming occurs when your long-distance company is changed without your permission. Cramming involves the practice of stuffing your phone bill with services you didn't order. Crammers hope you won't notice this deceptive tactic if their charges are wedged between a list of other charges and fees on your phone bill.

To help you avoid these devious practices, the North Carolina Telecommunications Industry Association (NCTIA) offers the following tips:

Slamming

- Always look at your bill carefully. Slammers sometimes switch a consumer's long-distance carrier without the customer knowing anything about it until the bill arrives. At other times, slammers may use devious language to coerce or trick customers into changing long-distance companies. Never agree to anything if you're unclear about what the caller is offering. Doing so could be construed later as approval for the switch.
- If you receive an unsolicited "rebate" check or coupon, read the offer carefully—particularly the fine print. Some companies use this ruse to entice you to change long-distance carriers. By cashing the check or redeeming the coupon you may be agreeing to a switch. Similar situations can occur with fraudulent contest or sweepstakes entry forms.
- Have your designated long-distance company "frozen." Your local phone company can help you with this. Requesting a carrier freeze prevents unauthorized individuals or companies from changing your designated long-distance carrier without your permission.
- If you believe you have been slammed, check first with other members of your household to see if anyone else agreed to change long-distance carriers. If not, you should contact your local phone company. They can designate your service back to your original long-distance provider. Your local company also will ensure you are not charged for the carrier change fees. You also will need to contact your original provider to request they reinstate your calling plan.
- Contact the company that slammed you. If you have not paid the charges, the slamming carrier should give you a credit for the first 30-days of toll charges. If

you have paid the charges, your original carrier should work with the slamming carrier to provide a refund.

Cramming

- Local phone companies sometimes provide billing services for third-party companies. That's how cramming charges can get on your phone bill. Cramming may involve a single unauthorized charge or monthly recurring unauthorized charges.
- Some of the precautions you can take against cramming are the same as those for slamming, e.g., review your bill thoroughly; don't agree to special offers you don't clearly understand; don't cash checks, redeem coupons or enter contests or sweepstakes without reading the fine print.
- If you see mysterious charges on your phone bill for products or services you did not order, contact the company that billed you for the unauthorized product or service. The bill should identify the source of the charges and provide a telephone number for billing inquiries. Also contact your local phone company to dispute the charges.

If your slamming or cramming issues are not resolved, you have recourse. Contact the Consumer Protection Division of the North Carolina attorney general's office. You also can contact the Federal Trade Commission.

NCTIA is a trade organization representing providers of telecommunications services to the citizens of North Carolina. Founded in 1932, the organization advocates for the telecom industry, offers education and training opportunities for its member companies and supports a pro-business environment for growth and economic development across the state.

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