Caller ID Spoofing

Caller ID spoofing is when a caller deliberately falsifies the information transmitted to your caller ID display to disguise their identity. Spoofing is often used as part of an attempt to trick someone into giving away valuable personal information so it can be used in fraudulent activity or sold illegally, but also can be used legitimately, for example, to display the toll-free number for a business.

What is neighbor spoofing?

Robocallers use neighbor spoofing, which displays a phone number similar to your own on your caller ID, to increase the likelihood that you will answer the call. To help combat neighbor spoofing, the FCC is urging the phone industry to adopt a robust caller ID authentication system.

Tips to avoid spoofing scams

You may not be able to tell right away if an incoming call is spoofed. Be extremely careful about responding to any request for personal identifying information.

- Don't answer calls from unknown numbers. If you answer such a call, hang up immediately.
- If you answer the phone and the caller - or a recording - asks you to hit a button to stop getting the calls, you should just hang up. Scammers often use this trick to identify potential targets.
- Do not respond to any questions, especially those that can be answered with "Yes" or "No."
- Never give out personal information such as account numbers, Social Security numbers, mother's maiden names, passwords or other identifying information in response to unexpected calls or if you are at all suspicious.
- If you get an inquiry from someone who says they represent a company or a government agency, 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 verify the authenticity of the request. You will usually get a written statement in the mail before you get a phone call from a legitimate source, particularly if the caller is asking for a payment.
- Use caution if you are being pressured for information immediately.
- If you have a voice mail account with your phone service, be sure to set a password for it. Some voicemail services are preset to allow access if you call in from your own phone number. A hacker could spoof your home phone number and gain access to your voice mail if you do not set a password.
- Talk to your phone company about call blocking tools they may have and check into apps that you can download to your mobile device to block unwanted calls. Information on available robocall blocking tools is available at fcc.gov/robocalls.

What can you do if your number is being spoofed?

If you get calls from people saying your number is showing up on their caller ID, it's likely that your number has been spoofed. We suggest first that you do not answer any calls from unknown numbers, but if you do, explain that your telephone number is being spoofed and that you did not actually make any calls. You can also place a message on your voicemail letting callers know that your number is

being spoofed. Usually scammers switch numbers frequently. It is likely that within hours they will no longer be using your number.

When is spoofing illegal?

Under the Truth in Caller ID Act, FCC rules prohibit anyone from transmitting misleading or inaccurate caller ID information with the intent to defraud, cause harm or wrongly obtain anything of value. Anyone who is illegally spoofing can face penalties of up to $10,000 for each violation. However, spoofing is not always illegal. There are legitimate, legal uses for spoofing, like when a doctor calls a patient from her personal mobile phone and displays the office number rather than the personal phone number or a business displays its toll-free call-back number.

What is blocking or labeling?

If a telephone number is blocked or labeled as a "potential scam" on your caller ID, it is possible the number has been spoofed. Several phone companies and app developers offer call-blocking and labeling services that detect whether a call is likely to be fraudulent based on call patterns, consumer complaints or other means.

FCC rules do not prohibit call blocking or labeling technologies, however the FCC is very concerned about ensuring that lawful calls are completed and has encouraged providers who block calls to establish a means for a caller whose number is blocked to contact the provider and remedy the problem.

You can legally block the transmission of your phone number when you make calls, so your number will appear as "unknown." Doing so is not spoofing.

What are the caller ID rules for telemarketers?

FCC rules specifically require that a telemarketer:

- Transmit or display its telephone number or the telephone number on whose behalf the call is being made, and, if possible, its name or the name of the company for which it is selling products or services.
- Display a telephone number 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.

How do I report suspected spoofing?

If you receive a call and you suspect 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.

Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275

- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

      Federal Communications Commission
      Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
      Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
      45 L Street NE
      Washington, DC 20554

More information

- FCC Chairman Ajit Pai talks about neighbor spoofing: Watch video
- News Release: FCC Issues $120 Million Fine for Spoofed Robocalls
- Learn more about stopping unwanted calls and texts.

Alternate formats

To request this article in an alternate format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number at the bottom of the page, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

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