

# The Do Not Call Registry and Unwanted Calls



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

Many people are bombarded by unwanted telephone calls—even though they are on the Do Not Call Registry. The calls pitch everything from “free” medical alert devices to credit and debt services. The unwanted calls can be disruptive and tie up phone lines.

So why is it so hard to stop them?

## The Problem

Rapidly evolving technology has made unwanted telemarketing calls hard to stop. When the federal Do Not Call law was first enacted in the 1990s, it worked fairly well. Even today, most legitimate organizations still respect a person’s desire not to receive unwanted calls. Unfortunately, scammers and criminals do not.

Modern technology has enabled scammers to place millions of “robocalls” and “spoofed” calls over the Internet, boldly violate the Do Not Call law, and evade detection. The calls are generally placed by criminals whose intent is to steal money, and these criminals do not follow regulatory “no call” laws. The scammers are almost always located outside of Minnesota, and many of them—including some of the most vicious callers—are based in foreign countries.

All of this has rendered the Do Not Call law much less effective than it once was and made it more difficult for people to stop unwanted calls.

Moreover, as discussed below, “robocalls” and “spoofed” calls are placed using Voice over Internet Protocol to misrepresent the name and/or telephone number displayed on the recipient’s caller ID device. By using “robocalls” and “spoofing” their calling information, scammers can conceal their true location and identity. This makes the scammers hard to apprehend. Because the scammers are trying to steal money from people and have no regard for the law, they are not concerned about violating the Do Not Call law.

## The Do Not Call Registry

The Do Not Call Registry prohibits many callers from placing telemarketing calls to consumers who have registered their phone numbers on the Do Not Call Registry. While legitimate companies usually honor the Do Not Call Registry, many of the most aggressive telemarketers are criminals attempting to commit theft or fraud. These criminals do not obey the law, so signing up for the Do Not Call Registry will not stop calls from them. Signing up for the Do Not Call Registry may, however, limit the number of unwanted telemarketing calls you receive from reputable companies.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) maintains and has authority to enforce violations of the Do Not Call Registry. You may register your home and cell phone numbers on the Do Not Call Registry by contacting the FTC as follows:

### Federal Trade Commission

(888) 382-1222

[www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov)

Note that the federal “Do Not Call” law exempts calls by certain organizations, such as charitable organizations and businesses with which you have done business in the preceding 18 months. Moreover, the Do Not Call Registry does not cover business-to-business calls. For more information about the federal “Do Not Call” law and its exemptions, click [here](#).

## In-house Do Not Call Lists

As noted above, some organizations are not required to follow the Do Not Call Registry. These organizations must, however, maintain their own “in-house” do not call list. If you ask each organization to put you on their individual in-house do not call list, the organization must stop calling you. Organizations that violate this law and continue to call you may be subject to a fine from the FTC.

## **New Technology Hides Callers' Locations**

As noted above, one of the reasons that law enforcement agencies have difficulty apprehending those who make unwanted calls is that technology often masks the caller's identity and location:

### **1. Robocalls**

Robocalls are automated telephone calls that deliver a pre-recorded message. Scammers use automated dialing software to make robocalls and can make millions of calls in minutes. If you answer the phone and hear a recorded message instead of a live person, you have received a robocall. There are a few types of robocalls that are legal, like calls about political candidates running for office or charities seeking donations. A robocall that tries to sell you something is illegal, unless you have given a company written permission to sell you something using a robocall. If you get a lot of robocalls trying to sell you something, the calls are probably illegal and could also be a scam. Due to advances in technology, robocalls can be spoofed. As discussed below, this means that robocallers can fake the name and telephone number that shows up on your caller ID, making it look like the call is coming from a legitimate caller or location, like the government or a local number.

### **2. Caller ID Spoofing**

Caller ID spoofing technology allows scam artists to trick caller ID devices into displaying any information they want. Scam artists may use caller ID spoofing to impersonate government agencies, banks, credit card companies, and other legitimate businesses. Increasingly scam artists "spoof" local, familiar telephone numbers to mask their identity. You might even see your own name and telephone number displayed on your caller ID device. The scammer who makes a "spoofed" call hopes that you will answer your phone so they can try to scam you. When a person returns a spoofed call, they find that the number is disconnected, not in service, or is assigned to someone who is very obviously not the scam artist. These scammers often live in another country.

### **3. Throw-Away Cell Phones**

Scam artists, like drug dealers, and other criminals, also use prepaid throw-away cell phones to mask their identity while perpetrating fraud. Scam artists often pay cash for these phones or register them under fraudulent and deceptive names in order to control the name that displays on caller ID devices. The scam artists generally live in another country or state and use a name and phone number only for a short period of time, after which they throw the phone away and buy a new one. This makes it very difficult for law enforcement to track the scam artists down.

## **Technology to Fight Technology**

Technology is allowing these criminals to place the calls and evade detection, and technology hopefully will ultimately thwart the calls. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the federal agency that has authority to regulate the telecommunications industry.

In response to the growing wave of unlawful robocalls and spoofing, the FCC implemented a caller ID authentication and verification framework to ensure that calls made using Voice over Internet Protocol contain accurate caller ID information. The FCC also authorized phone companies to block illegal calls without consumer consent, as long as they disclose such blocking, establish a dispute resolution process to stop erroneous blocking, and promptly resolve blocking disputes with their customers.

In addition, the FCC gave phone companies permission to offer opt-out call blocking programs and opt-in whitelist programs. It also authorized phone companies to block illegal calls without consumer consent, as long as they disclose such blocking, establish a dispute resolution process to stop erroneous blocking, and promptly resolve blocking disputes with their customers. The FCC also implemented a caller ID authentication and verification framework to ensure that calls made using Voice over Internet Protocol contain accurate caller ID information.

In light of the FCC's recent robocall and spoofing rules, we recommend that you ask your phone company about its call-blocking services and technology. For example, your phone company may allow you to create a whitelist (a list of numbers from which you wish to receive calls), a blacklist (a list of numbers from which you do not wish to receive calls), or may provide Do Not Disturb, call rejection, or call labeling services.

We also recommend that you share your concerns about robocalls and spoofed calls with the FCC (at the address below), which has authority to take action against spoofed calls.

## Report Unwanted Calls

If you receive unwanted telephone calls, you should contact the Minnesota Attorney General's Office to report the details of the call. The Office can sometimes trace the call to its source, making scammers easier to find and stop. You may also want to contact your phone company and file reports with the following agencies. In doing so, it is important to provide as much information as you can about the call, including the time and date of the call, the name and telephone number displayed on your caller ID device, and the nature of the call.

## The Federal Trade Commission

The FTC has authority to enforce violations of the Do Not Call Registry. It also has authority to enforce federal laws regulating autodialed and prerecorded message calls, as well as interstate fraud perpetrated over the telephone. Accordingly, regardless of whether or not your telephone number is on the Do Not Call Registry, you should report unwanted or scam calls to the FTC as follows:

**Federal Trade Commission**  
Bureau of Consumer Protection  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20580  
(877) 382-4357  
TTY: (866) 653-4261  
[www.consumer.ftc.gov](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov)

## The Federal Communications Commission

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has authority to enforce federal laws regulating robocalls and caller ID spoofing. It may impose financial penalties against individuals in the United States who violate federal robocall and caller ID spoofing laws. You should report robocalls and caller ID spoofing to the FCC as follows:

**Federal Communications Commission**  
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
45 L Street, NE  
Washington, D.C. 20554  
(888) 225-5322  
[www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov)