

Careless Dialing Could Cost You Money

Be careful when placing collect or other operator-assisted calls. You or the party you're calling may end up paying more than expected due to a scheme that takes advantage of individuals who misdial phone numbers.

The Scheme

You place a collect call from a public phone or payphone, intending to use a particular service, but you misdial. You get connected to the party you wished to call, but the phone company that connects you is not the one you thought you were using. Instead, it is a company that secured toll-free numbers similar to well-known ones, likely hoping that you misdial your intended number. If this happens, you are probably unaware you are not using your intended phone carrier because you don't know you misdialed. Often, the company won't identify itself before connecting the call.

Surprise! The charge for the misdialed call is much higher than it would have been had you reached your intended carrier.

Steps for avoiding the Scheme

When making collect calls, dial carefully. Make sure you hit each number only once. If you're unsure, hang up and start again.

Once you've made the call, listen for the provider identification. If you placed the call from a public phone or payphone, FCC rules require the provider to orally identify itself before your call is connected and billed. If you don't hear provider identification, ask the operator who the provider is and what the rates are. If the provider or rate is not what you wanted, or if you do not hear provider identification and you cannot reach an operator, hang up and dial again.

When receiving a collect call, listen for an identification of the service provider when the call is connected. Before accepting the charges, if you don't hear the provider identified, say "no" to the collect call until you're able to find out who is connecting the call. If it's a provider you're unfamiliar or uncomfortable with, ask for the per-minute rates. If you don't get an answer, say "no" to the call and, if possible, ask the caller to try again.

Review your phone bill carefully

If you suspect you're a victim of this scheme, contact the phone company that charged you for the call in question. The company's number should be listed on your phone bill. If you can't resolve the matter directly, you can file a complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint.

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
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Alternate formats

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