

Telephone Slamming

consumer**brief**

The woman complained when her long-distance telephone company was changed without her knowledge. Apparently, her daughter had unknowingly authorized the switch just by completing a Hawaiian vacation contest entry form that asked her for her home telephone number.

Every year thousands of consumers complain to the Federal Communications Commission (F.C.C.) about sudden, unauthorized switches in their long-distance phone service, a practice known as “slamming.” In fact, it’s the number one telephone-related complaint received by the federal government.

The F.C.C. tightened its rules to require that telephone companies get authorization from consumers before switching their service. However, authorization may be written or verbal, and clever marketers have found creative ways to get consumers to authorize switches without realizing what they have done.

BE CAREFUL

- **Contest, drawings and sweepstakes forms.** Read the fine print carefully before you submit entry forms. Be especially wary if the form says you must provide your telephone number and signature. Doing so may authorize a change in your long-distance company.
- **Rebates and checks.** Read the fine print very carefully before endorsing the check. Your endorsement may authorize a switch.
- **“Charitable” causes.** Be careful if you are asked to complete a form from a charity soliciting a donation such as two percent of your long-distance bill. Also, beware if a charity offers to



enter you in a drawing for a prize if you complete a form and give your telephone number and signature.

- **Telemarketing Calls.** Another long-distance company may call to ask you to consider switching, promising bargains in long-distance service. Even if you decline, or ask only for information, you may discover that the marketer has gone ahead and made the switch.

HOW TO AVOID SLAMMING

- Carefully read your telephone bill each month. Check to be sure that the long-distance carrier you selected is still handling your calls.
- Do not give out personal information about yourself, such as your home telephone number, without finding out how that information will be used.
- Read the small print before signing any form.
- Ask solicitors to send you information in writing and review it carefully before you switch carriers.
- If a charity asks questions about your long-distance phone service, be suspicious.

IF YOU DISCOVER YOU'VE BEEN SLAMMED

1. Contact your local carrier right away and let them know. You should not be billed for the cost to switch back.
2. Contact the Division of Consumer Affairs' Consumer Service Center at 1-800-242-5846 or your local or county consumer affairs office to file a complaint.

800-242-5846 • www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov

Office of the Attorney General



New Jersey Division of
**Consumer
Affairs**