



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

Utility questions, concerns or complaints?

**CALL TOLL FREE:
1-877-PICKOCC**

(1-877-742-5622)
or (614) 466-8574

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

10 West Broad Street
Suite 1800, Columbus, OH
43215-3485

E-MAIL:
occ@occ.state.oh.us

WEB SITE:
www.pickocc.org

HOW TO AVOID GETTING SLAMMED



“Slamming” is a deceptive and illegal practice that involves changing a consumer’s telephone carrier without their permission. Slamming can be costly to consumers who are victims of it. By simply becoming more informed you can avoid being slammed.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations have made it illegal for a company to switch your local or long-distance service without your authorization, either signed or oral and verified by a third party.

How it happens

Scenario #1: A telemarketer may call and try to switch you to a different telephone company. Even though you say “no,” you could be switched anyway.

Scenario #2: A small company buys telephone service from a larger carrier at wholesale rates and then resells this service to consumers at a retail rate. The small company may try to confuse customers by referring to the larger carrier in describing its own service and rates.

Scenario #3: A contest entry form may give you a chance to win a car, trip or (in fine print) a new telephone company. Various other slamming scenarios exist, including consumers receiving, signing and cashing a check that signs them up for a new telephone provider.

How to avoid it

You are already on the right track to avoiding a “slam” by educating yourself. Simply being aware that slamming can occur is important. Always read the fine print to find out exactly what it is you are signing for. In addition, be certain to:

- ▶ **Know who your local and long-distance providers are.** To verify your telephone providers call 1+your area code+700-4141 for local and local toll services, or call 1-700-555-4141 for your long-distance service;
- ▶ **Keep an eye on your telephone bills to see if your carrier changes or if the charges for your long-distance calls increase significantly.** The FCC and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) rules require

WHAT IS CRAMMING?

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues and resolves complaints from individuals.

To receive utility information, brochures, schedule a presentation or file a utility complaint, residential consumers may call 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free in Ohio or visit the OCC website at www.pickocc.org.



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carrier changes to be “clearly and conspicuously” identified on all telephone bills and require carriers to send a “welcome package” to new customers within 10 business days after the customer signs up for service;

- ▶ **Call your local telephone company and request a “carrier freeze.”** Your local company will switch your long distance service whenever a long-distance carrier makes a request. A carrier freeze (sometimes called a “PIC” freeze) may be the only way to block a change to your long distance service without your direct consent; and
- ▶ **Contact your local telephone company to check your account** if after switching long-distance carriers you have not received a bill from the new carrier within 30 days.

If you have been slammed

Call your local telephone company immediately and notify the customer service representative that you did not authorize the switching of your service and ask to be returned to your original carrier. You should tell your local carrier you want all “change of carrier charges” (also called PIC change charges) removed from your bill.

If the slamming involves long-distance service, also call your long-distance company and make it aware of the slamming. Ask the company to make sure your account is in order and that you will not be penalized with charges resulting from being switched.

Once a slamming complaint has been verified by the FCC or the PUCO, consumers who paid the unauthorized carrier are guaranteed compensation.

In situations where consumers who have been slammed **pay** the unauthorized carrier, the rules require the unauthorized carrier to pay 150 percent of all charges to your authorized carrier, which in turn is responsible for reimbursing you 50 percent of what you paid. For example, if you paid the unauthorized carrier \$50, the unauthorized carrier would be required to pay your authorized carrier \$75. Then your authorized carrier would pay you \$25.

Consumers who have been slammed and have **not paid** the unauthorized carrier, will not be responsible to pay for service for up to 30 days after the slam occurred.

If you think you've been slammed, you can call:

**The Office of the
Ohio Consumers' Counsel**
1-877-742-5622
(toll free)

**Federal Communications
Commission**
1-888-225-5322
(toll free)