

WAYS TO STOP UNWANTED CALLS



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel
"Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate"
www.occ.ohio.gov



Unwanted calls are a problem for many Ohioans. This fact sheet from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel explains how to reduce and report those calls.

Telemarketing calls are calls trying to sell products or services over the phone. They may involve live people or robocalls.

Robocalls are automated calls with a prerecorded message usually dialed by a computer. Advanced robocall technology makes it more difficult to know if the caller is a computer or a live person.

Some robocalls can be scams. A scam is an illegal attempt to get personal information or money. Consumers can be scammed if persuaded by a dishonest caller to provide personal or banking information. Scammers can "spoof" (fake) the name and number that shows up on Caller ID, making it look like a call is from a legitimate organization like a local utility.

Rules for callers

There are laws and rules governing telemarketing, which protect consumers from getting unwanted calls. For example, businesses cannot use robocalls to sell products or services unless consumers given the

business their prior clear, direct written permission—this can be electronic. In Ohio, telemarketers are required to give their real name, the name of their company, purpose of the call and what is being sold within the first minute of the call.

Telemarketers may not:

- Make calls to home phones before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m.;
- Block their telephone number on Caller ID;
- Take money from an account without permission;
- Use an auto dialer to market cell phones and fax machines without permission; or
- Ask consumers to pay by non-conventional payment methods, such as providing the PIN from a cash reload card, cryptocurrency, or using cash-to-cash money transfers like MoneyGram or Western Union, etc.

For more information on exceptions to these rules visit the Ohio Attorney General's website at www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov.

Reduce unwanted calls

To avoid unwanted calls from electric and natural gas marketers, contact the local utility company to be placed on the utility's do-not-contact list. Joining this list should always be free and can reduce sales calls from marketers.

Sign up for the National Do Not Call Registry.

Register by calling toll-free 1-888-382-1222 from the phone number you want to register. Registration is free, never expires, and reduces the number of legitimate telemarketing calls.

Online registration is available at www.donotcall.gov with an email address. Respond to the confirmation email within 72 hours for the number to go on the Registry.

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Register each phone number individually. If a phone number changes, the new number will need registered. Once the number is registered, it can take up to 31 days to go into effect. Check if a number is registered online at www.donotcall.gov or by calling 1-888-382-1222.

Consumers may still receive calls from political and some nonprofit organizations. Telemarketing calls can still also come from companies they have done business with during the last 18 months, or ones they asked to contact them within the past three months. To stop receiving those calls, ask to be placed on the telemarketer's internal do not call list. Companies must honor those requests for five years. **Remember, the Do Not Call Registry does not stop scammers from calling.**

Consider using Caller ID to screen calls. DO NOT answer calls for unknown names or phone numbers on Caller ID. Let the call go to voicemail. Remember that "spoofing," can make the call appear to be from a local or trusted number.

Check on spam blocking services. Many mobile providers now offer services that either block or label incoming calls that are likely from telemarketers or scammers so consumers can make an informed decision as to whether or not to answer.

Do not press buttons on the phone's keypad to be removed from call lists or to speak to a live person.

Be very careful sharing personal information. Putting a phone number on entry forms and contest applications can give telemarketers permission to call. Read the terms and conditions before filling out forms. Always be careful about sharing account, credit card, and Social Security numbers.

Handling unwanted calls

If the company does not identify itself, hang up. When in doubt, do not answer questions. Remember, calls do not need to be answered. Let the call go to voicemail.

Ask not to be called again. If speaking to a live person, ask to be put on the company's do not call list. If their sales pitch continues, repeat the request and hang up.

Use caution when speaking with a telemarketer. Ask questions. Consumers should take their time and thoroughly check out the company and its offer before doing business. Never disclose personal or financial information unless intending to buy.

Reporting unwanted calls

Consumers may still get calls they do not want. In that case, document the date and time of the call, and if possible, the name of the caller and their phone number.

Then, report them to the Ohio Attorney General's Office (AGO). File a complaint at 1-800-282-0515 or www.ohioprotects.org. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) accepts complaints regarding telemarketers and telecommunications issues at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) or at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us>. Using the "Tell Us Your Story" feature on their website alerts the FCC to an issue without filing a complaint.

Learn more about telecommunications, tips for handling telemarketers, and scams at www.occ.ohio.gov, www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov and www.ohioprotects.org. The FTC and the FCC also have more information at <https://consumer.ftc.gov> and www.fcc.gov.

For more information on how to file complaints, please visit www.occ.ohio.gov.