

Don't Get Slammed

How to respond when your
telephone company is changed
without your consent

When it comes to your phone service, we know you have many questions. The State of Wisconsin's TeleWatch program will give you plain talk about your telephone service.

Don't get slammed"Slamming" is the illegal practice of changing your telephone company without your knowledge or consent. Both federal and state rules prohibit slamming.

You have the right to use any long distance carrier you choose. In many areas, you can make separate choices of companies to provide local long distance and long distance service. You may also have a choice of local service providers. Slamming makes the choice for you, often without your knowledge.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires companies to obtain your authorization in order to change your phone company. That authorization must be either with a written document known as a "Letter of Agency," oral verification by an independent third party, or by providing a toll-free number that the consumer can call to confirm the order to switch telephone companies.

You're protected by the State

In addition to federal protections, Wisconsin laws and rules prohibit slamming. They also prohibit deceptive and unfair sales tactics and require a telephone carrier to notify consumers in writing that service is being provided.

Six tips to avoid getting slammed

1 Read the fine print.

Never sign anything without reading it carefully.

2 Just say "No."

If you receive a phone call about long distance service and you're not interested in switching your service, tell the caller that you're not interested in receiving their service.

3 Write a letter.

If you receive a postcard or letter "verifying" that you have switched services, notify them in writing that you did not authorize the change, then call your local telephone company and confirm that you are still with your preferred carrier.

4 Read all about it.

Read your phone bill carefully every month. If your calls are being billed by a company you're not familiar with, call the company listed for those charges on the bill.

5 "PIC freeze" it.

Ask your local telephone company if they are able to "PIC freeze" your long distance choice. This limits the changes which can be made without your written permission or a call by you to your local phone company. If you decide to change carriers at a later time, you must first have the PIC freeze removed. Your intraLATA and interLATA carrier selections must have the PIC freeze added individually.

6 Check it out.

To verify the name of your current long distance carrier for calls within your LATA, call 1-(your area code)-700-4141. To find out the name of your current long distance carrier for calls outside your LATA call 1-700-555-4141. A recording will give you the name of your long distance company. You have a right to choose a different company for each of these services. Both of these calls are free.

What to do if you get slammed:

- **Call the slamming company**

Call the company that slammed you and tell them to disconnect you from their service. If you haven't paid, tell them that you will not pay for the first 30 days of service. If you have paid, the slammer must refund 150% of the charges it received from you to your authorized carrier. That company will then reimburse you 50% of the charges you paid to the slammer.

- **Reconnect.**

Call the long distance company you were switched from to report the slam. Tell them that you want to be reinstated to the same calling plan you had before the slam. Any switch charges should be billed to the slamming company.

- **Call your local telephone company.**

Request to be reconnected to your long distance company. Tell them that you want all "change charges" (for switching companies) removed from your bill. Request a PIC freeze to prevent future unauthorized changes.

- **Report it.**

Report the incident to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC), or the Federal Communications Commission. Addresses and phone numbers can be found at the back of this booklet. Slamming is illegal, and many companies have been fined.

900/976 pay-per-call services

900 or 976 numbers are called "pay-per-call" services. Charges for 900 or 976 number calls, which are often much more than regular long distance rates, are set by the 900 or 976 number companies, not by the government or by the telephone companies that carry the calls.

Legitimate telephone and 900/976 number companies follow the rules, but fraudulent operators may try to take advantage of you by:

- Not clearly stating the cost of calls.
- Misrepresenting their goods or services.
- Luring children into making expensive calls.
- Using phony prize offers.
- Charging for calling toll-free numbers.

The law specifies the following regarding pay-per-call services:

- A message must warn callers of the additional charges for the call.
- Advertisements must tell you the cost of or rate for the call.
- Advertisements can't target an audience that's less than 12 years of age and can't target an audience less than 18 years of age without informing the caller that they must get the consent of their parents.
- In the case of an advertisement which offers a prize or award, the ad must disclose the odds of winning.
- Your local phone company must provide a free blocking service to prevent access to pay-per-call services from a given access line.
- Pay-per-call services on a collect call basis are prohibited.
- Your local phone company can't disconnect your phone service for nonpayment of 900 calls.

Who can help?

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is the state agency that oversees the telephone industry. Most local and in-state telephone billing and service complaints may be directed to the PSC. Call or write to:

P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854
(800) 225-7729 (800-CAL-PSCW)
TTY (608) 267-1479
Fax (608) 266-3957
E-Mail: pscsecs@psc.state.wi.us
psc.wi.gov

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection mediates and investigates telecommunications complaints, including those regarding mail and phone solicitations, deceptive and misleading marketing, and long distance rate changes. Call or write to:

P.O. Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708-8911
(800) 422-7128
TTY (608)224-5058
Fax (608) 224-4939
E-Mail: datcph hotline@datcp.state.wi.us
<http://datcp.state.wi.us>

The Wisconsin Department of Justice enforces state law, including telecommunications. Write to them at:

123 West Washington Ave.
P.O. Box 7857
Madison, WI 53707-7857
www.doj.state.wi.us

The Federal Communications Commission is the federal agency that oversees the telecommunications industry. Call or write to:

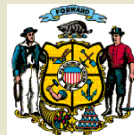
**Consumer Protection Branch
Common Carrier Bureau
445 12th St., SW
Washington, DC 20554**
Toll-free (888) 225-5322 (888-CALL FCC)
Toll-free TTY
(888) 835-5322 (888-TELL FCC)
www.fcc.gov

Bilingual service / Servicio Bilingüe

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is also able to provide customer assistance in Spanish. When calling the PSC, please ask to speak to a Spanish speaking representative.

En la Comisión de Servicios Públicos del estado de Wisconsin (PSC) podemos asistirles en español. Cuando llame a la PSC, pida hablar con un representante de habla hispana.

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the provision of programs, services, or employment. If you are speech hearing, or visually impaired and need assistance, call (608) 262-8524 or TTY (608) 267-1479. We will try to find another way to get the information to you in usable form.



This brochure was produced jointly by the WI Public Service Commission, the WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and the WI Department of Justice.