



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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DO NOT CALL AND OTHER WAYS TO STOP UNWANTED CALLS



Unwanted calls are a problem for many Ohioans. This fact sheet from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, your residential utility consumer advocate, explains how you can reduce and report unwanted calls.

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

Robocalls are automated calls with a prerecorded message, as if the call was from a robot. Robocalls dial your phone number automatically with a computer. Advanced robocall technology is making it more difficult to know if you are being called by a computer or a live person.

Some of these calls can be **scams**. A scam is an illegal attempt to get your personal information or money. You can become a victim of a scam if you are persuaded by a dishonest caller to provide personal or banking information.

What are the rules for callers?

Government agencies have made rules for telemarketers. The rules also protect you from getting unwanted calls. For example, businesses cannot use robocalls to your home phone or cellphone to sell products or services unless you have given the business your written permission. During sales calls, telemarketers are required to give the following information:

- ▶ Their name and phone number;
- ▶ The name of their company, a product description and the price; and
- ▶ The risk and earnings potential of investment offers.

Telemarketers may not:

- ▶ Make calls to your home phone before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m.;
- ▶ Take money from your bank account without your permission; or
- ▶ Send advertisements to your fax machine, computer, or cellphone without your permission.

There are exceptions to these rules. For example, robocalls may be used to contact you if they provide informational messages, like school announcements, emergency messages from government officials, and flight information. Phone surveys are allowed, even if they are robocalls, so long as they are not used to sell a product or service. Calls from political or nonprofit organizations are also allowed.

How can I avoid unwanted calls?

Consider purchasing caller ID.

Caller ID can be purchased from your telephone service provider. If you do not know the name or phone number on your caller ID, do not pick up the

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phone. Be careful, however. Some telemarketers use a process called “spoofing,” which makes caller ID equipment show that the call is from a local number. Look carefully at the number on the caller ID screen to make sure you recognize the number.

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

Be careful sharing your personal information. Be careful before giving away your phone number anywhere, such as on entry forms and contest applications. Read the rules before filling out forms, because you may be giving permission to telemarketers to call you. Always be careful about sharing account numbers, credit card numbers, and Social Security numbers.

Sign up for the National Do Not Call Registry. The Registry is free, your phone number is never taken off the list, and it will reduce the number of calls from telemarketers. Register by calling toll-free 1-888-382-1222 from the phone number you want to register.

If you have internet access and an email address, register online at www.donotcall.gov. If you sign up online you will be sent a confirmation email. Respond to the email within 72 hours to get your phone number on the Registry.

If you have more than one phone number, you need to register each number individually. If you change your phone number, you will need to register the new number. Check if your phone number is registered at www.donotcall.gov or by calling toll-free 1-888-382-1222. Once your phone number is registered, it can take up to 31 days before your unwanted calls stop.

There are exceptions to the Do Not Call Registry. After you register, you may still receive calls from the exceptions mentioned above, like political and nonprofit organizations. You may also receive telemarketing calls from companies you have done business with during the preceding 18 months. If you want to stop receiving telemarketing calls from such a company, ask to be placed on its internal do not call list. Companies must honor such do not call requests for five years. Also, the Do Not Call Registry does not prevent people trying to scam you from calling.

What can I do if I get an unwanted call?

If the company doesn’t identify itself, hang up. If you receive a call from a company that does not identify itself or that you do not recognize, do not answer questions. Do not press buttons on your phone’s keypad to be removed from call lists or to speak to a live person.

Ask that they do not call again. If you receive a robocall from a company you know, the menu should give you the option of being placed on the company’s internal do not call list. If it doesn’t, hang up. If you do speak to a live person, ask to be placed on the company’s do not call list. If the caller continues the sales pitch, repeat that you want no more calls from the company, state that you are ending the call, and hang up.

If you choose to speak with a telemarketer to learn about the products or services being offered, use caution and follow these tips:

- ▶ **Check the telemarketer’s credentials.** Get the name, address, and phone number of the company the telemarketer is calling for, and check its credentials with your local Better Business Bureau.

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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.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at www.occ.ohio.gov.



The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.

- ▶ **Ask questions.** Ask the company to send written information on the product, service, or charity before purchasing or donating.
- ▶ **Do not disclose financial information.** Do not give out information like your bank account number, credit card number, or prepaid card number over the phone. Do not send money to anyone who demands an immediate payment.

How can I report unwanted calls?

Even with all these ways to stop unwanted calls, you may still get calls. You can report unwanted calls to all of the following agencies.

- ▶ **The Ohio Attorney General's Office (AGO)** can penalize telemarketers who call a phone number on the Do Not Call Registry. Contact the AGO at 1-800-282-0515 or file a complaint at www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov. Complaint forms are available to print on its website and can be mailed to the AGO:

Consumer

Protection Section

30 E. Broad St., 14th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

- ▶ **The Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** enforces Do Not Call laws. Report a violation of the Do Not Call Registry, or file a complaint about a telemarketer at 1-888-382-1222 or at www.donotcall.gov.
- ▶ **The Federal Communications Commission (FCC)** accepts complaints regarding telemarketers and telecommunications issues at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) or at www.consumercomplaints.fcc.gov. Forms are available to print on its website. Complaint forms can be faxed to 1-866-418-0232 or mailed to:

Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau

Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division

445 12th St. SW
Washington, DC 20554

You can also alert the FCC about an issue without filing a complaint by using the "Tell Us Your Story" feature on the FCC's website.

- ▶ **The Better Business Bureau (BBB)** accepts complaints regarding phone providers or telemarketers, and helps solve issues with a business. File a complaint or seek to resolve an issue at www.bbb.org/consumer-complaints or by calling your local bureau. You can also alert the BBB and other consumers of a possible scam by reporting it to the BBB Scam Tracker at www.bbb.org/scamtracker.

When filing a complaint, you will need to provide the following information:

- ▶ Your name and address;
- ▶ Your phone number;
- ▶ The date and time of the call; and
- ▶ The name or phone number of the telemarketer.

Additionally, you can file a complaint against a telemarketer at your county's small claims court, which may require you to pay a filing fee. You can seek up to \$2,000 in damages per violation.

If you receive an unwanted call, be cautious, report the caller to the agencies that accept complaints, and take steps to block them from calling again. Learn more about telecommunications topics on the OCC's website, www.occ.ohio.gov/telecom.