

The information below was correct as of the date listed at the end. The laws may have changed. ***DO NOT ASSUME THAT THE INFORMATION IS CORRECT AFTER THE DATE PRINTED.*** You should see a lawyer to get complete, correct, and up-to-date legal advice. Do not rely on the general information in this newsletter for your specific case. If you need a lawyer but can't afford one, call Iowa Legal Aid at 1-800-532-1275. If you are not eligible as a client of Iowa Legal Aid, you may be able to find a lawyer by going to the Iowa State Bar Association's "Find a Lawyer" service at [iowabar.org](http://iowabar.org). ***AS YOU READ THIS INFORMATION, REMEMBER IT IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR LEGAL ADVICE.***

## How to Protect Yourself from Telephone Slamming

Telephone slamming occurs when a telephone company changes your telephone service without your consent. Slamming is illegal, and you can protect yourself from being slammed by following a few tips.

- Know the names of your local and long distance telephone companies. Read your monthly bills carefully and check for different carrier names. If your bill looks different or unusual, or your charges are significantly higher, call your local telephone company.
- If you get any sweepstakes entries or checks in the mail, read all print carefully before accepting the check or entering the sweepstakes. These documents often authorize a change in your telephone service. Look for language that indicates a change in telephone service. If you have questions about the entry or check, call the telephone company who sent it and ask questions.
- If you get a solicitation call from a telephone company, listen carefully to what they are offering. Ask whether you can switch back to your old telephone company without charge if you are not satisfied with the new service. If you are not sure about whether you want to change companies, do not feel pressured into a decision.
- Be wary of telemarketers who claim that they are from your local or long distance carrier and tell you that they are calling to get your approval to put all charges in one "handy" bill. Also be cautious if a telemarketer claims to need "verification" that they spoke with you and asks for information like your address and birth date.
- You can also ask the telephone solicitors to put you on their "do not call" list to prevent future calls from that company.

The best way to prevent having your telephone service switched without your permission is to tell your local telephone company that you want a "Preferred Carrier Freeze" on your long distance service. That means that any change in your service will have to be specifically okayed by you, and that a telemarketer cannot tell your carrier that you approved the change.

If you have been slammed, you can try to resolve the problem by taking the following steps:

1. Call your old telephone company, explain that you have been slammed and ask that they switch you back. There should be no charge to switch back.
2. Contact the company that slammed you. Tell them you did not agree to switch to that company and ask to see proof that you switched phone companies.
3. Federal law states you are not liable for all slammed charges for thirty days after an unauthorized change (this rule applies so long as the consumer has not yet paid the unauthorized carrier). Tell the company that slammed you to take the excess charge off your bill.

If you are unable to resolve the problem on your own, consider filing a complaint with the Iowa Utilities Board, 1375 E. Court Avenue, Room 69, Des Moines, IA 50319-0069 (telephone 877.565.4450 or 515.725.7321).

You can find an online complaint form at the Iowa Utility Board website: <http://www.state.ia.us/government/com/util/index.html>. (Last review June 2011)