

Consumer Beware: How to Protect Your Telephone from “Slamming” and “Cramming”

A Note from the Cambridge Consumers’ Council

By Corey Pilz, Complaint Manager

Notice that your phone bill is higher than usual? Don't recognize the name of a company on your monthly billing statement? You might have been a victim of slamming or cramming! Here are some tips to help you catch such charges:

Slamming

“Slamming” occurs when your local or long distance telephone service is switched from your original provider to another company without your consent. The best way to avoid being “slammed” is to carefully review your phone bill each month to ensure that your original carrier is still handling your long distance calls. Never give telemarketers your phone number or any personal information such as your address, Social Security number, bank information or credit card account numbers. Finally, *always read the fine print* before signing up with any carrier. In order for a carrier to change your long distance or local service, the company must obtain either written confirmation in the form of a signed letter or oral confirmation evidenced by a tape recorded call.

If you discover that you have been “slammed,” immediately contact your local carrier and let them know. In addition, you should not be billed for the cost of switching back to your original carrier. Remember: You have the right to choose your long distance carrier—and no one can switch you to a new one without your permission.

Cramming

“Cramming” occurs when a company adds a charge to your phone bill for a service you did not order, agree to, or use. Most cramming charges are assessed by a third party, but are billed through your normal telecommunications provider. Cramming charges can be small and easy to miss, especially since they may sound like fees you do owe. This often makes it tough to pick out such charges, especially if your phone bill varies month to month. The best way to avoid “cramming” is to *check the charges* on your bill each month for services, and ensure that these are services you have previously agreed to. If you are unsure about any charges on your phone bill, contact your telecommunications company and request a description of such charges.

If you discover that you have been a victim of “cramming,” contact your regular telecommunications provider and let them know. Ensure that you keep a copy of your bill and any other documentation to demonstrate that you have been billed for services that were not rendered. Some telecommunications companies also allow consumers to place a block on their telephone account that prevents third party billing.

We are here for you!

For further assistance in dealing with slamming or cramming, please contact the Cambridge Consumers’ Council at (617) 349-6150 or the Federal Communications Commission at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322).