



Caller ID Spoofing Tips

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If you have caller ID, you probably assume whatever shows up on the display is accurate and reliable. That could be a big mistake—and a costly one.

How Spoofing Works

For tech savvy scam artists, caller ID is a favorite tool. Caller ID spoofing, where the caller manipulates the information that shows up on caller ID, making it seem like they are calling from anywhere they choose, is increasingly common. Scammers use it to trick victims into handing over their money or personal information. (Much like the fake disaster relief agencies we reported on yesterday.)

Caller ID spoofing doesn't require a computer genius. In fact, it's easier than you might think. There are lots of web sites that sell spoofing "calling cards" which make spoofing as simple as just punching in some numbers. Other sites enable spoofing via a web-based system.

"It's as easy as making a phone call," says Robert Siciliano, CEO of IDTheftSecurity.com. "Most caller ID spoofing services only require a credit card to sign up and don't care or police how the service is used."

Scams Involving Spoofing

In one common spoofing scenario, the unwitting victim gets a call from what appears to be the local courthouse or law enforcement agency. The caller claims the person has missed jury duty, failed to pay their taxes or otherwise gotten in trouble. Naturally, the person receiving the call becomes upset and disputes this, at which point the caller helpfully offers to clear up the mistake—once the victim provides their Social Security number and other personal info.

Other variations of this scam involve crooks who appear to be calling from Western Union, a sweepstakes company (like those Publishers Clearing House scammers) or a bank.

Be warned: Spoofing can also be used by legit debt collectors and telemarketers. Although in the latter case, this violates federal regulations. The FCC prohibits telemarketers from blocking or disguising their caller ID information.

What Is Being Done?

Lawmakers have made several attempts to address this issue, though so far without any success. The latest attempt is a bill sponsored by Sen. Bill Nelson of Florida. The Truth in Caller ID Act of 2009, which would ban the transmission of phony caller ID numbers, was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation in January. Sue Macomber, a consumer advocate with the Utilities Consumer Action Network and a previous target of an attempted spoofing scam, says government action is urgently needed and encourages people to urge their lawmakers to support related legislation. "Ten states have supported taking action to prevent caller ID spoofing from being used against consumers who can easily become victims," says Macomber. "With the stalling of action, victims continue to be abused and stalkers tauntingly use this method of operation to commit their crimes."

How You Can Protect Yourself

The first step in guarding against caller ID spoofing is to know it exists and not simply take what the callers ID says for granted. Scammers will say anything to get you to divulge data. It is always suggested, if you feel you are being swindled, to hang up and call back. But don't call back the number they give you. Call a number that you get online or in the phonebook.

For More Information:

Visit the FCC's website at www.fcc.gov/cgb or rsfiber.coop/support/documents-links for RS Fiber Cooperative's policy.

Your Local RS Fiber Cooperative Contact Information:

Phone: (800) 628-1754

Address: 310 Main Avenue, Gaylord, MN 55334