

Protecting Your Privacy: Phone and Cable Records

In a time when numerous entities collect and store personal information, you want to make sure yours is secure. The FCC has regulatory programs in place to protect your privacy.

Your telephone calling records

Local, long distance and wireless phone companies, as well as IP service providers, collect certain customer information, such as the numbers you call and when you call them. They also track the services you use, such as call forwarding or voice mail. The companies may use, disclose or permit access to this information in these circumstances:

- As required by law.
- With your approval.
- While providing the service for which the customer information was obtained.

Your telephone company may only release your customer information to you upon request, with certain protections:

- Password for phone or online requests
- Valid photo identification if your request is made in person.

Additionally, your telephone company must:

- Confirm any new or changed password, back-up for a forgotten password, online account or an address of record.
- Obtain your approval to use your customer information for marketing.
- Maintain accurate records regarding disclosure of your customer information to third parties along with your approval.
- Submit to the FCC an annual summary of all consumer complaints received regarding unauthorized release of customer information and certify it is compliant with FCC rules.

Protecting your customer information

- Ask your service provider for details about how it protects the confidentiality of your customer information.
- Carefully read your telephone bill and any other notices you receive from your company. Determine if your company is seeking opt-in or opt-out permission to use or share your customer information for marketing, and make your choice clear to your provider. Your choice is valid until you inform your company otherwise.
- If you use a password when contacting your service provider to obtain your customer information, avoid using any sensitive or readily apparent information, such as your social security number.

Remember, customer information rules apply to all telephone companies: local, long distance, wireless and VoIP. Make your customer information choices known to each company.

Protecting your caller ID privacy

The FCC's caller ID rules require telephone companies to offer simple and uniform per-line blocking and unblocking processes. These are designed to prevent your telephone number from being transmitted to parties you call that subscribe to a caller ID service. The processes give you the choice of showing or blocking your telephone number for any interstate calls you make.

FCC rules require telemarketers to display on caller ID either their phone numbers and, if possible, their names, or the name of the company they represent. The display must include a phone number you can call during regular business hours to ask the company to stop calling. This rule also applies even if the company making the call has an established business relationship with you.

For more information about the FCC's caller ID rules, see the FCC's consumer guide at www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/spoofing-and-caller-id.

Privacy requirements for cable subscriber records

Cable service providers need to collect certain information in order to bill you properly, such as your address, the services you subscribe to and any pay-per-view transactions. Your cable provider is required to notify you when you begin service, and at least once annually afterwards, about any personally identifiable information that it will collect. It must tell you:

- The scope, frequency and purpose of personal information collected.
- The period during which information will be maintained.
- The times and places at which the subscriber may access his or her personal information.
- Any limitations placed on the cable operator by federal, state or local authorities regarding collection and disclosure of personal information, as well as your rights to enforce the limitations.

Cable operators must provide you access to your personal records at reasonable times and at a convenient place, and give you reasonable opportunities to correct any errors.

Finally, your provider may not disclose any of this information without your written permission. If you believe you have been compromised by cable provider's violation of any of these requirements, you may sue your cable provider in federal court.

For more information about FCC rules regarding the retention and availability of a cable company's public records, see the following FCC's consumer guide: www.fcc.gov/guides/cable-companies-record-retention-cable-subscriber-privacy.

Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Accessible formats

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