‘One Ring’ Wireless Phone Scam

If your phone rings once and then stops, think twice before returning the call. It may be a scam.

Some wireless consumers receive calls from phone numbers with three-digit area codes that appear to be domestic, but are actually associated with international pay-per-call phone numbers. These calls often disconnect after one ring to try to tempt consumers to return the call.

If you receive a call like this and do not recognize the number of the incoming call, *do not return the call*. If you do, you may be connected to an international hotline than can charge a fee for connecting, along with significant per-minute fees if they can keep you on the phone. These charges may show up on your bill as premium services.

How the scam works

Your wireless phone rings once or twice before the call is disconnected. The number that appears in your wireless phone log as a missed call appears to be a U.S area code, but is actually a three-digit international area code. If you return the call you will be connected to a phone number outside the United States, often in Canada or the Caribbean, and charged expensive international call rates. (For example, “649” goes to the Turks and Caicos, “809” goes to the Dominican Republic, “284” goes to the British Virgin Islands, and “876” goes to Jamaica.)

This scam appears to be a variation of fraud involving phony messages on answering machines urging you to call a number with an unfamiliar other area code to collect a prize or find out about a sick relative.

Tips to avoid the scam

- Check any unfamiliar area codes before returning calls;
- Be aware that many 3-digit area codes (mostly in the Caribbean) connect callers to international telephone numbers.
- If you do not otherwise make international calls, ask your local or wireless phone company to block outgoing international calls on your line.

Remember, you should always be cautious even if a number appears authentic. Criminals may also engage in caller ID "spoofing" – deliberately falsifying the information transmitted to your caller ID display to disguise their identity. (See our consumer guide on Caller ID and Spoofing.) Bottom line: Avoid answering or returning any calls from unfamiliar area codes or calls you suspect may be spoofed.

What to do if you are a victim of this scam

If you are billed for a call you made as a result of this scam, first try to resolve the matter with your telephone company. If you are unable to resolve it directly, you can file a complaint with the FCC at not cost.

Filing a complaint

Federal Communications Commission • Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau • 445 12th St. SW. Washington, DC 20554
1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) . TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) • Fax: 1-866-418-0232 • www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau.

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

Filing a Complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

If you feel that you are a victim of an international phone scam, you can file a complaint with the FTC online at www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov. You can also submit a complaint by calling the FTC toll-free at 1-877-382-4357 (voice) or 1-866-653-4261 (TTY), or writing to:

Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20580

Alternate formats

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