

FCC Consumer Advisory

Mexico Collect Call Scam

The FCC has learned of a telephone scam that originates in Mexico and apparently targets people in Hispanic communities.

Consumers report that they have been deceived into accepting a collect call from a particular family member when, in fact, the call is from a stranger. The consumer is then fraudulently billed a large amount for a call that lasts a few minutes or less – or for a nonexistent call.

This scam seems to be prevalent in Spanish-speaking communities in California, Texas, Florida, New York and Illinois. The scam is targeted at Spanish-surnamed consumers.

Here's How it Works

An operator calls the consumer's residential telephone number and tells the consumer he/she has a collect call from a family member who has an emergency or an important message. The operator has all the relevant information – the family's last name, husband's name, wife's name, etc. The operator provides the consumer with the "calling family member's" name. The consumer accepts the operator-assisted call, assuming there is a real emergency or message. Upon accepting the call, the consumer is then connected to a complete stranger who gives information that is not related to the consumer's family. Realizing the call is a fraud, the consumer immediately hangs up, but is still billed for the call.

In some cases, the consumer is not even allowed to respond "yes" or "no" in accepting the call; the operator automatically puts the call through without waiting for an affirmative response. Other times, the consumer actually declines the call and is still charged a very high rate for a collect call that was never accepted.

Here's How to Avoid This Scam

Consumers should use voice recognition as a tool for identifying the person placing the collect call. Specifically, consumers should ask the operator to have the person placing the collect call speak his name, instead of allowing the operator to say the name of the person placing the collect call. Also, consumers should carefully examine their monthly telephone bills for accuracy, and report errors to the company billing for the erroneous charges.



Filing a Complaint with the FCC

Consumers who become victims of this scam are encouraged to file a written informal complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for this. Your letter should include your name, address, telephone number or numbers involved with your complaint, a telephone number where you can be reached during the business day, and the name of your long distance carrier. Your complaint letter should provide as much specific information about your complaint as possible, such as an explanation of the circumstances that led to your complaint, the names of all telephone or other companies involved with your complaint, the names and telephone numbers of the telephone company employees that you talked with in an effort to resolve your complaint, the dates that you talked with these employees, and any other information that would help the FCC to process your complaint. (Your local telephone company also often has records that are essential to processing your complaint.) Mail your complaint to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

To file a complaint electronically, go to www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html. You can file by e-mail at fccinfo@fcc.gov or fax your complaint to 202-418-0232.

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