

AVOID THE TELEPHONE SLAM JAM

The competition among long distance telephone companies continues to fuel a decade-old scam called "slamming." Slamming occurs when someone switches your long distance carrier without your authorization. You can be slammed intentionally or by mistake.

You probably will not know you are a victim of slamming until you get your next month's telephone bill. In many instances, the switch in service is made without you doing anything. Sometimes, however, you are tricked into authorizing the switch without knowing it.

Con artists sometimes use contests to get people to unknowingly sign authorization forms. For example, a booth at a mall or a flea market might offer a chance to win a free vacation. To enter, you must fill out a form. But the form also authorizes the company to switch your long distance carrier. The lesson: read all sweepstakes forms carefully.

Unscrupulous long distance marketers sometimes also send customers checks in the mail. Do not let the lure of the cash fool you. Read the small print. If you cash the check, your long distance carrier will be changed.

If you get called by a marketer selling long distance service, feel free to ask questions, but make it clear you are not ordering a switch.

The Federal Communications Commission says a company selling long-distance service over the telephone must take one of the following actions:

- ?? Obtain your valid, written authorization to switch.
- ?? Have you verify your consent by phone to an independent third party.
- ?? Send you information, including a postpaid postcard for you to return if you don't want the company's service.

If you are slammed, ask your local telephone company to switch you back to the long-distance company you want. The switch is free. You may also have to contact the company that slammed you if any charges or bills are involved.

The name of your long distance carrier appears on your monthly statement.