



Consumer Alert

Are You Creating High Long-Distance Bills While Using Your Computer?



Have you received a telephone bill that included calls made to another country? You or other members of your household may not remember placing the calls, but they are included on your monthly telephone bill.

What you didn't realize is that you or someone in your home probably made the calls with the **computer** doing the dialing!

What's Happening?

Some entertainment websites include a link that, when clicked, automatically disconnects the user's Internet connection and dials an international long-distance telephone number. Calling rates for these calls can easily exceed \$7.00 per minute. In the past, these sites were primarily related to adult entertainment, but have now expanded to include sites related to games, sports, psychic services, gambling, travel deals, and other topics. Typically, the user is prompted to access more information on a topic. Sometimes a small print disclaimer will appear on the screen that informs the user that an international long-distance telephone number is about to be dialed. But, often the number is dialed without warning, by a simple click on a link.

International calls may also be dialed and charged to customers who respond to unsolicited e-mail. The e-mail message is typically a brief teaser line promoting merchandise or a service. There usually is an attachment to the message that the user is encouraged to open to access more information. Once the attachment is opened, the computer dials the overseas call. Like the Web site scams, these e-mail scams include an array of consumer products and services.

How can you protect yourself while using your computer?

- ◆ Listen for suspicious dialing activity when using your computer. Turn up your modem's volume setting so you can hear it dialing. If you see an onscreen dialog box or icon indicating that your computer's modem is dialing when you did not direct it to, quickly disconnect the connection. Inexpensive switches may be purchased and connected to your modem for this purpose.
- ◆ Be cautious when surfing the Internet, especially when visiting unfamiliar web sites. Read online disclaimers carefully before you connect to a site. Be sure you understand what you are agreeing to before downloading a program.
- ◆ Talk to your family members about international dialing scams and review this information with them. It is important for parents to monitor their children's Internet usage and instruct them that international calls are expensive.
- ◆ Be cautious about opening unsolicited e-mail and attachments – even if they pass your anti-virus program's scrutiny.
- ◆ Request an international block from your local and long-distance telephone companies for your computer line, and have a complete toll restriction placed on the computer line to prevent a connection for a long-distance call. (Verify that the block works).

Who can you contact with a complaint?

If you think you are a victim of a computer-generated international telephone scam, contact your local and long-distance telephone companies and request an investigation. If you cannot resolve your complaint with your telephone companies, contact the following state and federal offices:

Michigan Attorney General
Consumer Protection Division
P.O. Box 30213
Lansing, MI 48909
877.765.8388
www.michigan.gov/ag

Federal Trade Commission (FTC)
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Attn: Consumer Response Center
Washington, DC 20580
877.382.4357
www.ftc.gov

Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
Consumer Information Bureau
Common Carrier Complaints
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554
888.225.5322
www.fcc.gov

STATE OF MICHIGAN
Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth
Michigan Public Service Commission
Customer Support Section
PO Box 30221
Lansing, MI 48909
800.292.9555
www.michigan.gov/mpsc
Alert 07-27 • July 2007



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