

Consumer Information from Mid Oregon Credit Union

News Now: [May 23, 2011](#)

Protect against phone bill 'cramming'

WASHINGTON (5/23/11)--Have you noticed a charge on your phone bill for something you didn't purchase? You may be the victim of cramming.

Cramming is the term that describes unauthorized third-party charges on mobile and landline telephone bills.

Consumers can pay for services not offered by their phone carrier--such as subscriptions, collect calls, and charitable donations--through their phone bill. Cramming occurs when unscrupulous third parties place false charges on the bill to collect money for services they didn't provide.

Cramming has the attention of lawmakers in Washington and consumers are seeing some relief. The Senate Commerce Committee's investigation into the practice has helped reduce the number of unauthorized charges on millions of consumers' phone bills (*Consumer Reports* May 17).

The problem is far from over, however. Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, referred to cramming as an extensive problem for both businesses and consumers during a Federal Trade Commission forum on the subject (*The Hill* May 11).

The good news is that you can take these steps to protect yourself from cramming:

- *Understand your bill.* Take time to familiarize yourself with the layout of your phone bill, understand the terms used, and be aware of the legitimate charges. Contact your phone carrier if you have any questions. You can also visit the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) website to learn more about both wireless and landline telephone bills.
- *Review your charges.* Review your monthly phone bill to make sure you're only being charged for services you've requested. Pay close attention to any charges labeled in generic terms such as "service charge," "activation," "Web hosting" and "voice mail." Also look for collect calls you didn't accept and calls placed to unfamiliar area codes. These may also be indications of cramming.
- *Be careful with contests and giveaways.* Read the fine print for any contests, giveaways and prize drawings you enter. Crammers often use these methods to trick consumers into registering for services.
- *Block third-party charges.* Ask your phone company if it's possible to block all charges from third parties. Understand that this may limit you from using legitimate third-party services; many, but not all, phone carriers will honor this request.

Reprinted with permission from the Credit Union National Association (CUNA)

Consumer Information from Mid Oregon Credit Union

CUNA (Credit Union National Association), based in Washington, D.C., and Madison, Wisconsin, is the premier national trade association serving America's credit unions. The not-for-profit trade group is governed by volunteer directors who are elected by their credit union peers.