Cell Phone Fraud

Cellular fraud is defined as the unauthorized use, tampering or manipulation of a cellular phone or service. Two main types are cloning and subscriber fraud, which are both illegal under the Wireless Telephone Protection Act.

What is subscriber fraud?

Subscriber fraud occurs when someone signs up for service with fraudulently obtained customer information or false identification. Lawbreakers obtain your personal information and use it to set up a cell phone account in your name. Resolving subscriber fraud could develop into a long and difficult process for victims. It may take time to discover that subscriber fraud has occurred and even more time to prove that you did not incur the debts. Millions of dollars are lost each year due to subscriber fraud. Call your service provider if you think you have been a victim of it.

To prevent subscriber fraud, make sure your personal information is kept private when purchasing anything in a store or on the Internet.

What is cell phone cloning fraud?

Every cell phone should have a unique factory-set electronic serial number (ESN) and telephone number (MIN). A cloned cell phone is one that has been reprogrammed to transmit the ESN and MIN belonging to another (legitimate) cell phone. Unscrupulous people can obtain valid ESN/MIN combinations by illegally monitoring the radio wave transmissions from the cell phones of legitimate subscribers. After cloning, both the legitimate and the fraudulent cell phones have the same ESN/MIN combination and cellular systems cannot distinguish the cloned cell phone from the legitimate one. The legitimate phone user then gets billed for the cloned phone’s calls. Call your service provider if you think you have been a victim of cloning.

To prevent cell phone cloning fraud, ask your service provider about authentication systems installed by device manufacturers as a countermeasure.

Consumer Help Center

For more information on consumer issues, visit the FCC’s Consumer Help Center at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

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