

From WAFB News in Baton Rouge

By [Liz Koh](#) | February 17, 2020 at 4:48 AM CST - Updated February 17 at 6:30 AM

Information provided by the Better Business Bureau

Robocalls are being classified as an annoying epidemic for both consumers and businesses. So much so that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) changed its rules on blocking unwanted calls and creative, tech-savvy individuals are coming up with ways to block the onslaught of calls that continue to haunt our devices. Cell phone providers are also trying to do their part by offering blocking services. Now, there's new United States legislation to tackle the problem. American's phones rang 5 billion times in the month of November 2019 just from robocalls alone - almost 2,000 calls per second.

What's a robocall?

If you answer the phone and hear a recorded message instead of a live person, it's a robocall. Calls use a computerized autodialer to deliver a pre-recorded message to a home landline or wireless number. Many different scams use robocalls, from bogus companies claiming to lower utility bills or credit card rates, government grants, vacation packages and calls from individuals posing as IRS agents.

What types of robocalls are allowed?

Since 2020 is an election year in the United States, keep in mind recorded messages regarding candidates running for office or charities asking for donations are allowed. Messages that are solely informational, for example a reminder from your doctor's office, are permitted. Prerecorded messages from banks, telephone carriers and charities also are exempt from these rules if the organizations make the calls themselves.

Canadian laws differ slightly. Robocalls from charities and political candidates are also allowed; however, calls from telemarketers are only allowed if you have an existing business relationship, such as having recently made a purchase or inquired about a product. Read Canada's detailed regulations [here](#).

How do I know if a robocall is illegal?

In the U.S., an immediate red flag is if the recording is trying to sell you something. If the recording is a sales message and you haven't given your written permission to get calls from the company on the other end, the call is illegal.

A telemarketer must have your written consent, whether through paper or electronic means, to receive a call or message. Simply buying a product, or contacting a business with a question, does not give them legal permission to call you. The new rules also require telemarketers to allow you to opt out of receiving additional telemarketing robocalls immediately during a prerecorded telemarketing call through an automated menu.

How to avoid robocall scams:

The Federal Trade Commission recommends three key steps consumers can take to help reduce unwanted calls: **Hang up. Block. Report.**

- **Hang up.** If you pick up the phone and get a recorded sales pitch, hang up. The call is illegal. Don't speak to them. Don't press a button to supposedly remove your name from a list. (That could result in even more calls.) Hang up. Furthermore, alert your employees that if they see a call that says it's from the IRS or Social Security Administration, don't trust it. Scammers know how to fake the Caller ID information.
- **Block.** You can reduce the number of unwanted calls you get by using call-blocking technologies. Your options differ depending the model of your phone, service provider and whether you use a traditional landline or internet phone service. Visit ftc.gov/calls for advice.
- **Report.** After you hang up, report the unwanted or illegal call to the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint. The more information they have about the call, the better they can target our law enforcement efforts.

What you can do to stop robocalls:

Consumers can help the government combat robocall scams by reporting the calls they receive.

The FTC recently announced Operation Call it Quits, a partnership with state and federal partners to crack down on robocalls. As of June 2019, it's included 94 actions targeting operations around the country that are responsible for more than one billion calls. Be sure to report the unwanted or illegal call to the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint.

In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission initiative provides telecommunications companies and other partners with known robocallers' telephone numbers every day. The FTC collects scammers' telephone numbers from consumer complaints, and the more consumers who report numbers, the faster it can develop its blacklist database. Report a scam call here. In Canada, residents can also report illegal robocalls. Go to the National Do Not Call list to file a complaint.

Consumers can also report robo calls to BBB.org/ScamTracker. BBB shares Scam Tracker information with government and law enforcement agencies, so every piece of information is helpful in tracking down scammers.

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