

LEGAL AID ATTORNEY WARNS SENIORS OF NEW ‘SPOOFING’ TELEMARKETING TRICK

If your phone rings and caller ID shows that it's your own number or one very similar to it, the caller may be perpetrating a scam used by unscrupulous telemarketers to persuade you to pick up the call. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) calls this “spoofing,” which has been around for years but has become much more common in Oklahoma during the past year.

Attorney Richard J. Goralewicz, who heads up the Senior Law Project of Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, said scammers and telemarketers are able to download a “spoof app” which camouflages their true identity. Many collection agencies have used spoof apps for years, knowing that a person is more likely to answer their call if the caller ID shows a local number and “looks innocent.”

“When someone gets a call from their own number, or a very similar number, maybe a digit or two off, the caller claims to be from the phone company purportedly testing the line. They will ask for verification of the consumer's birthday, the consumer's social security number or other identifying information. They will then ask the victim to punch in a series of numbers which somehow allow the bad guy to hack into their phone records,” he said. Once the person answers the call, the telemarketer will ask the confused or irate consumer to punch in a series of numbers to remove themselves from the calling list.

“This too is a ruse to gain identity theft information,” said Goralewicz, adding that caller ID fraud is illegal under federal law. If an individual/entity masks their caller ID status with a false or deceptive number, and can be proven to have done so with an intent to defraud, they may be assessed a civil fine of up to \$10,000. There are a number of limited exemptions to the law, including law enforcement and social service agencies such as Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, who assist vulnerable persons in danger of violence or abuse when the abuser still is

living in the house or apartment. In those cases, the caller ID may be disguised to protect the victim from more violence.

According to Goralewicz, the FCC says it is virtually impossible to prevent spoofing or even to guard against it due to the number of phone services and the spread of technology. “The best response is to do what we can to educate consumers on what to look for and avoid. As with most scams, the elderly seem to be primary targets,” he said. “The best response is simply to hang up. If your own phone number shows on caller ID, don’t ever answer. Never give out personal information and never follow the directions of the unknown caller.”

Goralewicz has written two pertinent brochures, “Scam-Proofing for Seniors” and “Identity Theft – when the bad guys take your good name.” To request brochures or to schedule a free one-hour presentation on scam-proofing for your group or organization, call 405.488-6771.

More information here: <http://oklaw.org/resource/phone-number-spoofing-scams-alert>

Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma is a not-for-profit law firm, which provides free civil legal assistance to eligible low-income individuals and their families and to elderly persons in the areas of family, consumer, housing, health and employment. Legal Aid attorneys and staff work through a network of fully-staffed law offices and satellite offices, serving eligible clients in all 77 counties of Oklahoma. The statewide toll-free number to call for legal assistance is 1-888-534-5243.

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