

THE DENVER CENTER FOR CRIME VICTIMS

PHONE SAFETY

Wireless, cordless and home plug-in phones (landline) are part of our lives. You may not consider safety when answering or making calls. Criminals use phone calls to steal your identity, gather information for a break-in, or simply harass unsuspecting people. To protect yourself:

- **Keep recorded messages simple:** “This is 555-5555. Please leave a message.”
- **Always use Caller ID to screen your calls.** Check that your phone has this capability built-in. If you don't recognize the number, let the call go to voicemail. If it's someone who really needs to speak with you, they will leave a message.
- **If any number comes up and you wonder “whose phone number is this?” don't answer the phone.** This is especially true if you have reason to worry about your safety, such as if you've just left a bad relationship or you've angered someone. Do not answer such calls, no matter how curious you are about who might be on the other end.
- **Avoid freely giving out your number if you have no good reason to do so.** Consider making your number unlisted. If your name is in the phone book, use your first initial only. This makes it more difficult for callers to trick you into giving out information by pretending they know you. If you are a female living alone, it is important not to use your full name.
- **There are legitimate reasons to give out your number or answer calls** from people you've never met. When selling something through an ad or on the Internet, potential buyers will want to call you. In this case, use email so that you can be in control of the communications.
- **Keep a landline phone in your house.** A landline phone gives a direct line to emergency services. As soon as 911 picks up, they know your exact address to send help right away. If you have a home security system, it hooks directly to emergency services.
- **Children in the home should learn phone usage,** whether they are allowed to answer the telephone or not. Train them not to let the caller know they're home alone. They should know all emergency numbers, including 911, your work number, and a trusted relative's number. Keep a list next to the phone. Teach kids how to make a collect call if they're away from home and need to reach you. Note: Collect calls only work when calling a landline.
- **A prank, obscene or harassing call can be intimidating or downright scary.** Report them to the police. Call the phone company to see how you can have the number blocked and ways to find out who is calling you.

Directory Listings

- Call Qwest (1-800-244-1111 to change Qwest Dex directory listings. Two choices:
 - **Nonlisted:** Name/number not in directory; still available from directory assistance.
 - **Nonpublished:** Name/number out of directory; can't get from directory assistance.
 - There's a charge for either option. For health/safety purposes, nonpublished or nonlisted info may be given when you call 911 or other emergency service providers.

TELEPHONE SAFETY (cont.)

Caller Identification and Other Phone Options to Block and Reject Calls

With the widespread use of many different phone service providers for land lines, cordless and wireless phones, there are many different features offered that will show or reject calls from certain individuals and business. Some have added costs.

Contact customer service at your phone provider to find out what services are available for your particular phone(s), such as Caller ID, Call Rejection, Call Tracing, Last Call Return, etc. Some may have extra charges and installation fees.

Three types of calls are considered annoyance calls:

- Threatening calls: When you and your family are threatened with verbal or physical abuse or your property is threatened or damaged.
- Abusive, harassing or obscene calls: Calls meant to terrify or infuriate you through language used by the caller.
- Nuisance calls: Prank calls meant to irritate, e.g., constant and frequent hang-up calls.

Threatening calls

These may require intervention by the police: threats to life and property, of kidnapping, robbery or bodily injury to you or members of your family, or bomb threats. They may be repeated for a period of time to harass and frighten you.

Abusive, Harassing or Obscene Calls

The purpose is to infuriate or terrify you. They may include silent or obscene calls. Make sure to take control, don't show emotion or talk to the caller, and contact the police.

Nuisance Calls

Nuisance calls don't just come from strangers, but from acquaintances, neighbors and business associates.

Prank Calls:

- Generally made at random. If you don't give the caller any satisfaction from the prank, the person will usually give up after a few attempts. If you receive a call, hang up.
- You can use Last Call Return. To find out who called, redial your last incoming call, lift the receiver and dial "star (*) 69." The caller's number will be heard. If you decide to return the call, press "1" and the number will redial.

Anonymous Calls:

- These callers try to get information from you. Don't talk to anyone unless you want to. Use the telephone on your terms, not those of the caller. If the caller asks, "Who is this?" don't give your name. Instead, ask, "What number did you call?" or "Who do you want to speak to?" If the call is legitimate, these questions will be answered. Be direct and inform the caller you are not interested, then hang up.
- Never give out a credit card number on a call unless you ordered the product or service.

TELEPHONE SAFETY (cont.)

- Ask telemarketers to make sure nobody at the firm calls again. The Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991 says telemarketers can call only once a year before being told not to, and requires them to keep “do not call” lists. If a company calls a second time, you can sue in small claims court for \$500 per offending call.
- Coloradans are encouraged to register on two do-not-call lists to keep telemarketers away.
 - Colorado No-Call List: <http://www.coloradonocall.com/> or call 303-776-2678 or 800-309-7041.
 - National Do- Not-Call List: <http://www.ftc.gov/donotcall> or call 1-888-382-1222 (TTY 1-866-290-4236).

Keep a Record of Incoming Threatening, Abusive or Harassing Calls

Record date, time, person, telephone number, background noises, distinctiveness of voice, etc. Keep a pad and pen handy so it gets written down immediately. Things to note down:

- In what specific ways was the particular call(s) abusive, harassing, obscene or otherwise annoying?
- Does what the caller says change when different members of the family answer the call?
- Has your family had any recent publicity (marriage, promotion, crime, etc.)?
- Can you hear background noise? If so, describe it.
- Is there anyone who wants to annoy or “get even” with any member of your household?
- Have you reported these annoyance calls to the police?