CONSUMER ADVISORY

October 2014 **By Attorney General Tom Miller**

Hold the Line on Annoying Robocalls

How to respond to unwanted or illegal prerecorded robocalls

If you signed up for the "do not call list," then why hasn't it stopped those annoying pre-recorded calls? It's a question that many Iowans ask as they complain about robocalls.

Robocalls are recorded voices that often utilize autodialers to make large batches of calls simultaneously. Robocalls can include sales messages, "phishing" scams that try to trick you into providing financial or personal information, charitable calls, political campaign or survey calls. They also include calls that inform you about an airline's flight status, remind you of an upcoming medical appointment, or inform you that school has been delayed or canceled due to inclement weather.

National Do Not Call Registry

You can stop most telemarketing calls by adding your number to the National Do Not Call Registry (1-888-382-1222 or www.donotcall.gov). If you registered your landline or wireless number with the National Do Not Call Registry, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) forbids commercial telemarketers from calling you, subject to certain exceptions. If you have added your number to the National Do Not Call Registry, be skeptical of any telemarketing robocall you receive.

Exceptions

Those exceptions include political campaigns; marketers with whom you have conducted business within the last 18 months; tax-exempt and non-profit entities; businesses contacting you about an existing debt, contract or payment; businesses that started within the past year; health or safety-related prerecorded messages or emergency calls; and organizations to which you have given prior consent.

Caller ID: Not Foolproof

While caller ID can identify the source of most incoming calls, robocallers often use technology to thwart the service. The most common form is "spoofing," which masks the true source of the number calling you. The call, which may originate from outside the country, may appear on a caller ID display as coming from another source, look like a local call, appear as blocked or unavailable, or even display your own number.

Recently, Attorney General Tom Miller joined with other states in urging the FCC to allow phone companies to utilize more sophisticated caller identification technologies and blocking filters for consumers who request better protection from unwanted calls and scams.

Unwelcome Robocall?

Unfortunately, unscrupulous and fraudulent telemarketers tend to disregard laws including Do Not Call Registry requirements. If you receive a robocall that you think is violating the law or is simply unwelcome:

- Hang up the phone. Don't press number keys, as that may confirm to the source of the robocall that it has reached a valid number. That could cause you to receive more calls.
- Don't provide or "confirm" financial or personal information, as the request may be fraudulent. If a recorded voice asks you to "verify" personal or financial information, hang up. Look up the phone number of the supposed source of the call on a recent financial statement and call to confirm the claim from the robocall.
- You can request your phone provider to block the number associated with a robocall, though your provider may charge for the service. However, the source of the call may change its actual or "spoofed" number, thus defeating your caller-ID display and call blocking.
- If you think a call has violated the law, write down the time, date, caller-ID information (if available), and a summary of the call. Save any recorded messages.
- You can report Do Not Call Registry violations to www.donotcall.gov, or call 1-888-382-1222.
- If you receive a call that is falsifying or missing required caller-ID information, you can report it to the FCC at www.fcc.gov/complaints or call 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322).