

Surprise!

What happens when telephone company isn't who you thought?

Dear Attorney General Kline: I was quite surprised recently when I received a phone bill from a company that I had never agreed to do service with. When I called who I thought was my telephone provider, they informed me that I had been slammed.

Is there anything your office can do to assist me with this problem?

Dear Kansas Consumer: Our office may be able to assist you. "Slamming" is the illegal practice of changing a consumer's telephone service - local, IntraLATA service, or InterLATA service (including state to state, in state and international long distance) - without permission. The Kansas Consumer Protection Act (KCPA) contains a provision that prohibits the switching of consumer's phone service without authorization.

Although there are various companies that may engage in such practices, we recently entered into a Consent Judgment with Business Options, Inc., a/k/a U.S. Bell wherein the defendants have agreed to stop switching Kansans' long distance telephone service without proper authorization, to provide consumer restitution and to pay the State of Kansas \$25,000.

The defendants previously provided a full refund or credit to consumers who filed slamming complaints with the Kansas Attorney General's office.



Phill Kline

•Consumer Corner

In addition, the defendants have agreed to resolve any further complaints for slamming, if such complaints are received by the Kansas Attorney General's office by February 12, 2004 for any alleged slams that occurred prior to the date of the entry of the Consent Judgment on November 14, 2003.

Below are tips to follow if you think that you are being targeted for a slam or have been a victim of telephone slamming:

- Carefully listen to any new or discounted long distance telephone service offered over the phone (if the caller implies they are a major carrier, ask whether they are reselling time on a major carrier's lines or if they are, in fact, a representative of a major carrier.) Take notes on what you are told or ask for the information in writing.

- Examine your phone bills to make sure your long distance carrier has not been switched without your authorization.

- If you believe you have been switched, you can verify your long distance provider by calling 1-700-555-4141 or your local toll service by calling 1-(your area code)-700-4141. These calls are free.

If your local or long distance tele-

phone service has been switched without your authorization, contact the Kansas Corporation Commission at 1-800-662-0027 or send e-mail to public-affairs@kcc.state.ks.us to register a complaint. The complaint should include:

- Your name as the customer of record; mailing address or service address; home and work phone numbers; name of the utility; your account number; The facts about what the utility did or did not do, include dates, times, location and persons involved; the resolution you expect; signature and date.

Editor's note: Attorney General Phill Kline offers this public service to help people avoid becoming victims of consumer fraud.

Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For information or to file a complaint, write Attorney General Phill Kline, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th Ave, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kan. 66612 or call the toll free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310.

Bill to improve 911 endorsed

TOPEKA (AP) — A bill that would add 50 cents a month to wireless telephone bills to fund improvements in county 911 systems was endorsed Wednesday by the House Utilities Committee.

The committee's unrecorded voice vote sent the measure to the House for debate.

Supporters estimated the new fee would raise at least \$7.8 million a year.

Proponents say the goal is to increase the likelihood that someone making a 911 call on a wireless phone can be located.

Currently, emergency personnel in most Kansas counties' dispatch centers are shown the number but not the location of a cell phone on which a 911 call is made — information automatically provided on calls made from traditional phones.

In addition, 911 calls made on cell

phones are sometimes mistakenly routed to other counties or even across state lines, supporters of the legislation say.

"This will save lives, no doubt about it," said Rep. Carl Krehbiel, R-Moundridge.

Utilities Committee Chairman Carl Dean Holmes said the bill could give Kansas one of the nation's best 911 systems.

"If this works the way we want it to, we'll essentially be the first large state where, if you make a cell phone call, they'll pick it up and be able to locate you," said Holmes, R-Liberal.

But a few committee members opposed the measure.

Rep. Eric Carter, R-Overland Park, questioned whether the enhanced 911 systems contemplated by the bill will become obsolete quickly.

Carter said phones that can automatically show a caller's location to a dispatcher might become widespread soon.

He also said problems with routing calls and locating callers occur mostly in rural areas, not in urban centers or along interstates, where wireless service is strong.

Wind power property tax exemption tabled for now

TOPEKA (AP) — A Senate committee chairman backed away Wednesday from his proposal to eliminate a property tax exemption for companies that build wind farms for generating electricity.

The Assessment and Taxation Committee took no action on a bill from Chairman Dave Corbin or an alternative he offered that would require wind farms to make annual payments to counties in lieu of taxes.

Kansas law exempts all property used regularly to generate electricity from renewable sources, such as solar, wind or water power.

The exemption was made available by state lawmakers for 1999 year.

Some residents of the Flint Hills oppose proposals to build wind turbines there, arguing that the construction would disturb pristine prairie, spoil views of the landscape and hurt tourism.

But Corbin, R-Towanda, said his main concern is that the exemption

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High levels of radon undetected

High levels of radon have been found in homes in every county in Kansas, raising concerns about the dangers of human exposure to this often undetected hazard.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas found throughout the U.S. which seeps up from the earth's crust into the atmosphere and becomes a health hazard when it is concentrated inside an occupied building such as a home, school, or business. It is odorless, tasteless, and invisible and can go undetected for years, placing the health of those exposed at risk for cancer.

"Nearly 4 out of 10 home tests completed in Kansas exceed EPA levels," said Roderick Bremby, U.S. secretary of health.

County extension offices and specialty suppliers have radon home test kits. For questions call the hotline at 1-800-693-5343.

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