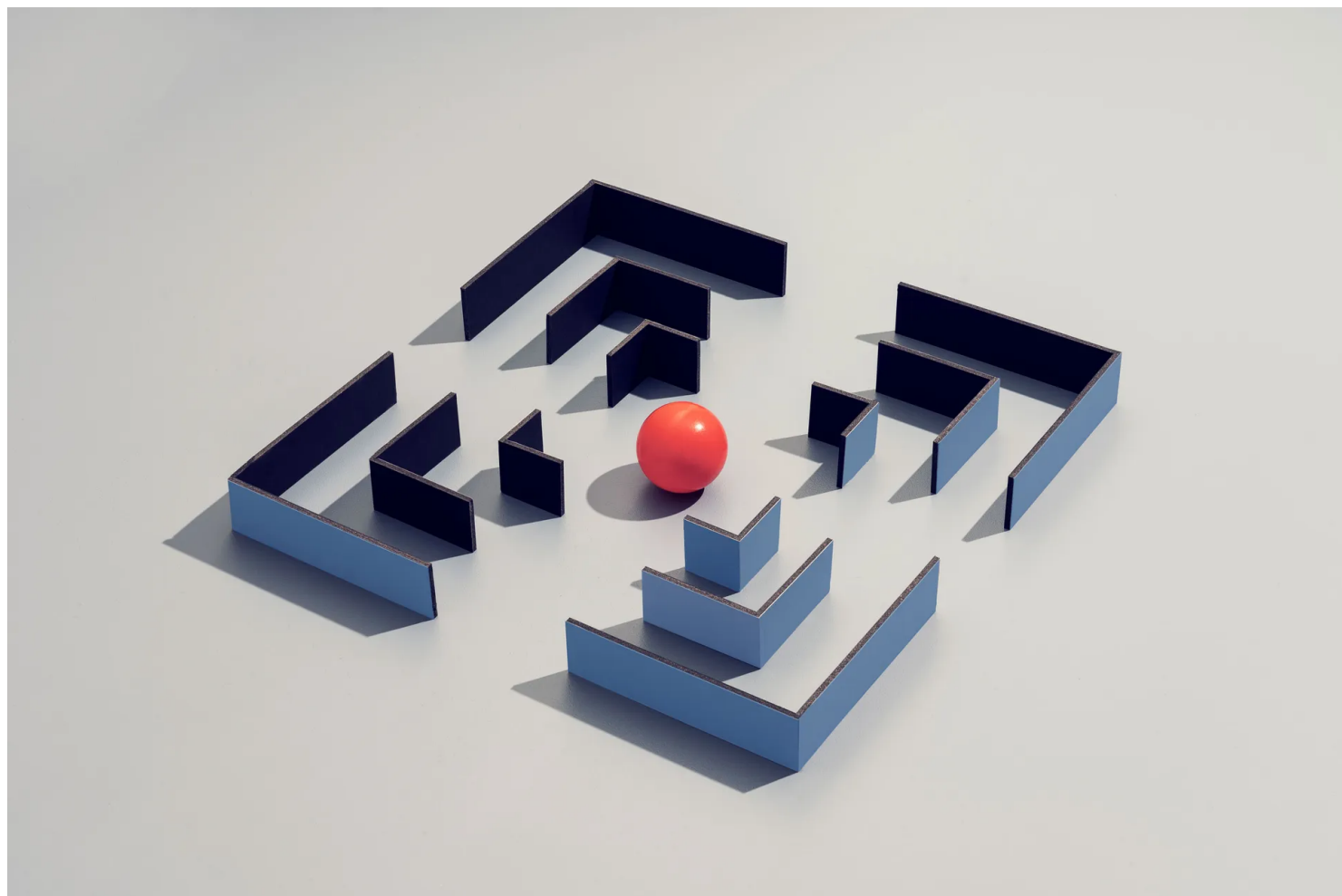


SIMON HILL GEAR MAR 12, 2022 10:00 AM

How to Block Spam Calls and Text Messages

Learn how to fight the scourge of unsolicited rings and pings from spammers, scammers, and telemarketers.



PHOTOGRAPH: DANIEL GRIZELJ/GETTY IMAGES

LIFE IS BUSY enough without wasting time on spammers, scammers, and telemarketers. Whether you are suffering insistent injury lawyers, fraudulent IT specialists, or a drunk-dialing ex, there is a way to stop the calls and messages. The major carriers and phone manufacturers have upped their game against unwanted calls and messages in recent years, so let's look at how you can effectively block them.

We also have guides on [how to avoid spam with disposable contact info](#), [guard against smishing attacks](#), and [avoid phishing scams](#).

What to Keep in Mind

Before we dive into blocking options, there are a few things to know:

- If possible, don't answer any calls from numbers you don't recognize. Callers with anything important to say will likely leave a message anyway. Sadly, this won't work for people with businesses or interests that involve a lot of calls from unknown numbers.
- Never click on a link or attachment in a spam text message because it could trigger malware. If possible, avoid opening them altogether.
- Never respond to a spam text message, as it will confirm that your number is valid.
- If you are concerned that the call or message might be from a legitimate company, try typing the number into your preferred search engine. While it can be tricky to confirm a scammer's number, it is easy to verify a legitimate one. If you can't find anything on the number, be cautious and ignore it. We will explain how to block numbers, but it's also important to report unwanted calls and messages. If it's telemarketing, scam, or spam, you can [report it to the FTC here](#). You can also add your number to the Do Not Call Registry, though it only works for sales calls from reputable companies. Sadly many organizations and scammers ignore it. We will go into how to report numbers to manufacturers, carriers, and third parties below. The more people do this, the easier it is to identify and preemptively block or label nuisance numbers.

How to Block Calls and Texts on an iPhone

APPLE VIA SIMON HILL

It's easy to block individual numbers on your iPhone. Here's how:

- In the Phone app, tap **Recents**, then tap the **Information** icon next to the number or contact you want to block. Scroll down and tap **Block This Caller**.
- In the FaceTime app, tap the **Info** icon next to the number, contact, or email address you want to block, then scroll down to tap **Block This Caller**.
- In the Messages app, open the conversation with the contact you want to block, then tap the contact at the top, then tap the **Info** button, scroll down, and tap **Block This Caller**.

and tap **Block This Caller**.

Once a caller is blocked, you won't get notifications when they call or send a message, but they won't be able to tell that they have been blocked and will still be able to leave voicemails. You can review and unblock callers anytime:

- Open **Settings**, **Phone**, and tap **Blocked Contacts**.
- Open **Settings**, **FaceTime**, and tap **Blocked Contacts** under **Calls**.
- Open **Settings**, **Messages**, and tap **Blocked Contacts** under **SMS/MMS**.

Filtering Unknown Callers and Senders

APPLE VIA SIMON HILL

Unfortunately, blocking individual numbers isn't very effective when telemarketers or scammers are contacting you, as they use multiple numbers and change them frequently. But there is something else you can do:

- Open **Settings**, **Phone**, and scroll down to tap **Silence Unknown Callers**.
When you toggle this feature on, it automatically silences calls from numbers not saved in your contacts. They can still leave a voicemail, and the calls will appear in your recent calls list.
- You can do the same thing for messages by going to **Settings**, **Messages**, and scrolling down to toggle on **Filter Unknown Senders**.

If you open a message that turns out to be spam, always tap the **Report Junk** link under the message and then **Delete and Report Junk**.

How to Block Calls and Texts on an Android Phone

GOOGLE VIA SIMON HILL

It's straightforward to block numbers on an Android phone, too, but the method does differ from manufacturer to manufacturer.

- On a stock Android device, like Google's Pixel phones, open the Phone app and tap on the **Recent** tab. Long-press the number you want to block and tap

Block/report spam. You can choose whether to uncheck the box marked **Report call as spam** and then tap **Block**.

- On a Samsung Phone, open the Phone app and go to **Recents**, tap the number you want to block, then tap **Details** and **Block**.

Filtering Unknown Callers and Senders

GOOGLE VIA SIMON HILL

If you are getting a lot of unwanted calls and messages and the numbers keep

changing, you might want to filter out any unknown numbers.

- Open the Phone app and tap the **three vertical dots** at the top right, then **Settings**, **Blocked numbers**, and toggle on **Unknown** (or **Block unknown callers** on a Samsung phone).
- You can also turn on caller ID and spam protection. Open the Phone app and tap the **three vertical dots** at the top right, then **Settings**, then tap **Caller ID and spam** to get options to **See caller and spam ID** and **Filter spam calls**. (You can simply toggle on **Caller ID and spam protection** on a Samsung phone.)
- If you have a Google Pixel phone, try call screening to have Google Assistant answer for you and generate a transcript. To try it, open the Phone app and tap the **three vertical dots** at the top right, then **Settings**, **Call Screen** and choose the voice you want. If you have turned the spam filter on, it should screen your calls automatically, but you can also tap **Screen call** when a call comes in.
- Open the Messages app and tap the **three vertical dots** at the top right, then **Settings**, **Spam protection**, and toggle on **Enable spam protection**.

How to Block Calls or Texts With Your Carrier

The major carriers offer apps that can help you to recognize nuisance numbers and block calls or messages from them.

- **AT&T** offers the Call Protect app. The basic version is free and offers spam and fraud call blocking, nuisance call alerts, and unknown call blocking. The Plus version costs \$3.99 per month per line and adds caller ID, reverse number lookup, and additional nuisance call controls.
- **Verizon** has a similar app called Call Filter. It offers spam detection and filtering, a white-list option for iOS, and a neighborhood spoofing filter. The Plus version costs \$2.99 per month for one line or \$7.99 per month for three or more and adds caller ID, spam look-up and risk meter, and a personal block list.
- **T-Mobile** has the free Scam Shield app, which offers caller ID, scam detection

and blocking, and even a proxy number you can use when you don't want to share your real number.




- **Google Fi** offers various blocking options and caller ID for free in the Google Fi app.
- **US Cellular** has the Call Guardian app offering caller ID, spam alerts, and spam reporting. The Premium version, at \$3.99 per month, offers enhanced alerts and caller ID, and automatic call blocking.

You can also report spam messages to your carrier for free by forwarding them to 7726.

What About Third-Party Apps?

There are countless Android and iOS apps claiming to offer spam protection and robocall blocking, but we advise caution if you're thinking about using one. For these apps to work properly you must grant them access to your call logs and contacts. While apps like RoboKiller (\$4.99 per month) or Nomorobo (\$1.99 per month) are legitimate, there are many unscrupulous apps out there that may share or sell your data or fail to hold it securely. Do some homework before trying a third-party app, and consider their business model and privacy policy.

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[Simon Hill](#) has been writing about tech for more than a decade. He is a regular contributor for WIRED, but you can also find his work at Business Insider, Reviewed, TechRadar, Android Authority, USA Today, Digital Trends, and many other places. Before writing, he worked in games development. He lives... [Read more](#)

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– **UncleScotty** 3 months ago

At the risk of being accused of having ANY "leanings", I HAVE to ask why you would cover iPhone methods FIRST in a world that has THREE TIMES as many Android devices. Could it be that YOU are a fanboy, Simon?

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– **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 2 months ago

↩ In reply to **UncleScotty**

No, I love all smartphone platforms equally.

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– **HighTechGeek** 3 months ago

THE ONLY SOLUTION to this is and has always been for telecommunications companies to disallow spoofed numbers. They have the tech to verify numbers but refuse to implement it. Blocking numbers doesn't work when the numbers are just random spoofed numbers from your own area code. I've even received a spam call from MY OWN NUMBER.

But they won't because THEY MAKE \$\$ FROM SPAMMERS. You even point out above where Verizon charges recurring monthly fees for their useless Call Filter.

Today's world is all about profits. Ethics are dead. When I get a scammer on the line (sadly daily), I ask them what their mother's think about them hurting and stealing from people. I ask them why they don't feel deep shame for their behavior.

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– **SwervingLemon** 3 months ago

I'm surprised WIRED hasn't yet written an article about Jolly Roger Telephone Company.

Roger Anderson has made an awesome tool that not only blocks most robocalls, but actively tries to engage with scammers and records the best sessions for you to laugh at later.

1. It's cheap.
2. It wastes their time, which screws up the scammer's profit metric.
3. You can see in the "captains log" that you have a ten minute recording from a suspected scammer, so your lunch break can have some entertainment while you listen to somebody go through all stages of grief with the realization that they were talking to a very well crafted chatterbot.

Also, it's a pretty decent digital receptionist, and works even with services where nomorobo won't (like spectrum business lines).

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– **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 2 months ago

↩ In reply to **SwervingLemon**

Looks interesting, I may check it out. Thanks!

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– **NavalHistorian** 3 months ago

Unfortunately, scammers figured out how to get around call/text

Unfortunately, spammers figured out how to get around call/text blocking years ago. The alternative to calls is less annoying because your phone doesn't ring, but it has the potential to fill up your voicemail.

I recently got my first "ringless voicemail." The spammer left me a voicemail without the phone ringing and the call did not appear on my calls list at all. Unfortunately, I couldn't find specific data on how many ringless voicemails consumers in the US/UK/Europe receive, but it appears to have been a popular discussion topic on various carrier message boards over the past year, so perhaps the problem's growing.

Back in 2017, a company called All About the Message filed a petition that asked the FCC to declare ringless voicemails from the Telephone Consumer Protection Act. They argued that since the phone doesn't ring, they're technically not calls. The proposal got so much backlash it was recalled. Unfortunately, the FCC hasn't addressed the issue at all since then. On February 2, FCC chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel issued a proposal to extend the TCPA to ringless voicemails. Unfortunately, it's unknown when (or if) the FCC will take up this proposal.

I also found it interesting to learn that even though the DNC list has existed since 2003, the FCC didn't comprehensively track how various US carriers handled robocalls until it created the Robocall Mitigation Database in September 2021.

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— **Lion** 3 months ago

I was getting 10 calls an hour recently when I signed up to get information on health insurance - which I thought was a legitimate site. It was driving me insane, so this is what I did on my iPhone:
Settings --> Phone --> Silence Unknown Callers --> On

Anyone who is legitimate will leave a voicemail. If you happen to miss a call from your doctor's office or pharmacy because you don't have their number programmed into your phone, it sucks to miss those calls, but they will leave a voicemail. If you're expecting a call from someone and don't know their number, just turn off Silence Unknown Callers, which I do every time I order lunch for my boss.

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— **lindal** 3 months ago

Is there a way on iPhone (6+) to block calls from an entire country. I once had an email client that let me block entire countries and zip codes, but I don't see that feature on any of my devices anymore.

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– **Lion** 3 months ago↩ In reply to **lindal**

The only thing I know to do is Silence Unknown Callers on my iPhone, but that silences every number you do not already have programmed into your phone. This could be anything from a doctor's office to your kid's school, so it's a hard decision to make if you want to silence all calls. Anyone important/legitimate will leave a voicemail, but then you have the hassle of having to call them back.

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– **SEB** 3 months ago

Did I miss something here? What about land lines?

I work at home and receive at least 10 to 15 calls from spammers each day, misrepresenting Discover, Chase, Spectrum, ATT, Bank of America, Citibank, Social Security, Border protection, Amazon. On March 14, Spectrum called 3 times, Discover 2 times, Amazon 2 times. Never the same number twice. The DNC registry and Nomorobo are useless. I tried to block through my local provider, Frontier, through *67, but that doesn't work. The numbers keep changing. I've waged my personal war, messaging and direct contact with the companies, resulting in the Corporate Shrug. They are big, rich companies with access to all sorts of technology, but they choose to do nothing; they don't care that their companies are being blatantly misrepresented.

What are the FCC/FTC doing about this misrepresentation and harassment? I've filed complaint with the FCC and they kindly provide me with a ticket number.

This is a real scourge on the American public.

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– **cfizz34** 3 months ago↩ In reply to **SEB**

I too want to know how to block this on land lines.

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– **KenClipperton** 3 months ago↩ In reply to **SEB**

I just published a blog article about solutions that block robocalls from landline phones. See <https://bit.ly/block-robocalls-on-landline-phones>. I am the creator of one of the solutions.

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– **DriversSeat** 3 months ago

Wasn't SHAKEN/STIR supposed to stop spoofing of caller ID numbers?

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– **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **DriversSeat**

Yes, you are right, it is supposed to help prevent illegally spoofed calls, but hasn't been implemented everywhere yet (the deadline for smaller carriers is June 30 2022).

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– **TelecomExpert** 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **Simon_Hill**

No, you are wrong. SHAKEN/STIR was never designed to be accurate enough to block calls. Considering that most scam calls come from overseas, it likely never will be. Instead SHAKEN/STIR only puts a green check mark indicating that some calls from some networks to some devices are NOT spoofed. (If you use an iPhone the green check mark is only seen in the call history after the call ends.) It does not identify spoofed calls. Currently about 60% of all valid calls and about 0% of scam calls are authenticated by SHAKEN.

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– **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **TelecomExpert**

Thanks for your comments. So, there should be some value in combining whitelisting with the ability to see a legitimate (non-spoofed call), though if you can only see the checkmark after the call that doesn't seem very useful.

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– **SEB** 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **Simon_Hill**

First I heard of SHAKEN/STIR. I checked out the FCC website (<https://www.fcc.gov/call-authentication>) and it seems pretty damn ineffective, judging by the frequency of calls on my landline.

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— **bjarteao** 3 months ago

There are countless Android and iOS apps claiming to offer spam protection and robocall blocking, but we advise caution if you're thinking about using one.

You are right in cautioning about the use of these apps, but at the same time, using one of these that actually works, is a lot more effective than blocking individual numbers yourself.

It would be much better if Wired tested the different apps against each other, so we know which to trust and which that actually work.

With spoofed phone numbers, where the scammers call from new phone numbers all the time, you need collaborative services to be able to keep your block list updated, you will not be called from the same number twice.

Disclaimer: I'm behind Norway's most popular such app/service, called hvemder.no (meaning "Who's There" in Norwegian).

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— **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **bjarteao**

Thanks for the comment. That's a good idea, we may look into testing some of these apps in the future.

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— **TelecomExpert** 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **Simon_Hill**

If you look at the stats available on the [FTC.gov](https://www.ftc.gov) website you can see no call blocking technique (either network of handset app based) has ever had any impact. This is because scam calls are made by VoIP and the call sender can instantly see when a call is blocked and automatically make another calls with another caller ID.

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— **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **TelecomExpert**

So, what, if anything, would you recommend for people suffering from unwanted calls?

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— **bleo** 3 months ago

Once a caller is blocked, you won't get notifications when they call or send a message, but they won't be able to tell that they have been blocked and **will still be able to leave voicemails.**

Is that accurate? I think a blocked contact can go through the motions of leaving a voicemail, but I don't believe the recipient is notified at all. AT&T call protect logs all calls, even from blocked contacts. But back out in iOS, I see no record of a call, and no record of a VM.

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— **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **bleo**

Yes, you're right they don't appear in your regular log, but if you scroll down to the bottom of the voicemail window you should see a Blocked Messages option.

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— **ddcross** 3 months ago

"...If it's telemarketing, scam, or spam, you can report it to the FTC [here](#)".

You could report it. Or you could write the information on a piece of toilet paper and flush it down the toilet.

Equally effective.

And the do not call registry? It's only use is to define the list of numbers for the criminal's automatic dialers. When you get illegal calls, you can report them to the do not call registry, or you could write the number on a piece of toilet paper...

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— **TelecomExpert** 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **ddcross**

You could report it. Or you could write the information on a piece of toilet paper and flush it down the toilet.

It is not very effective; but it is not completely ineffective. That stats that go into Consumer Sentinel are useful for overall tending that can

inform tactics of both carriers and law enforcement.

For example, while it is true that when you submit a report to FTC no one actually looks at it, if you lost money and put that down and law enforcement later determines who did it (like, a money mule gets arrested cashing out gift cards at a Target store or the phone company traces calls and reports the source to law enforcement), the investigator can search Consumer Sentinel and add all connected victims to the base.

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– **gailcats** 3 months ago

I have AT&T's free Call Protect. This blog says: "(You can simply toggle on Caller ID and spam protection on a Samsung phone.)" However, I HAVE a Samsung phone (Galaxy S9), and there is NO such setting as Caller ID and Spam Protection anywhere in the Settings—I looked for it everywhere! I already have Block Unknown Callers toggled on, yet I still occasionally get a call labeled Unknown by Caller ID.

Also, I already do everything listed: I never answer calls whose numbers are not already in my Contacts or not otherwise identified by Caller ID. I never even touch the Decline button, even when a call is disrupting what I'm doing on my phone, because I don't want the human or bot callers to know my number is a working number.

And yet I get far too many calls every day from unidentified numbers, many of them labeled Spam Risk or Telemarketer by Caller ID. I promptly block every number I can (some I cannot block because the system can't find them), and every time a scammer robocall leaves a fake voicemail claiming to be AT&T DirecTV (the real company NEVER calls or leaves voicemails), I report every calling number, plus any toll-free callback number they give in the message, to the FTC. But there are so many of them, and they call from a different number every time. Very annoying!

....And BTW, what's with this web page?! It was SO HARD to type this comment: Every time I touch my phone screen, it blows up the size to a million times bigger, so I have to keep reducing it and then scrolling back to the box where my comment is. I've NEVER had this problem on this phone with any other web page!!! Grrr. 🙄

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– **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **gailcats**

Sorry to hear you are suffering from unwanted calls. Sadly, some carriers tweak the features that Samsung phones offer, so that might account for the missing Caller ID and Spam Protection.

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– **Nathan_May** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **gailcats**

Thanks for leaving the comment and sorry to hear you had problems with this web page. We will look into the issue and find a fix as soon as possible.

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– **Nathan_May** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **Nathan_May**

Hi gailcats, I have received some information relating to the problem you experienced when leaving the comment. Would you be happy for me to email you with the details?

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– **MarkWinz** 3 months ago

My default ring tone is custom, four rapid beeps, repeated, and then 30 seconds of silence. Anyone in my Contacts has a different ring tone assigned. I can tell unknowns from the tone, glance at the phone if I'm expecting a return call from somebody local. It also helps that I have a Chicago phone number but live elsewhere. Spammers try to use local exchanges, so they are easy to ignore.

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– **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **MarkWinz**

Smart thinking. Glad you have worked out a way to screen them! Thanks for the comment.

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– **alaskagadfly** 3 months ago

Simon: sorry, but at least on my iPhone, the scammers (and some spammers) have a new tactic. I don't care how they do it, all I know is I go to "recent" and the number is not there. How do I block that? The number also tells me information. Looking at the Area code and the exchange, I see my old home town. That's the Social Security scam. That town is in Alaska (area code), isolated on an island (exchange), has eleven thousand resident at most - and the Social Security office closed a couple decades ago. Or it comes from a town in Arkansas of 410 people. (Yea WIKI!) Maybe you need to ask some techies, and tell us if there is a way to counter that.

Or the "address" is a URL. Apple doesn't explain how to block it, and it doesn't go to the "recent" list

Or it tells me there is a Freeze on my bank account - at a bank I never did business at. That bank just laughed at me when I tried to report it: "Oh, we get so many of those we don't even try to trace them and don't bother to record them from customers and the public." So tell us why the back can get away with that? Who is at fault? Is Congress still determined not to stop scammers and spammers?

The IRS scam that has the letterhead right, spelling is correct, etc. My blocked numbers now exceeds the number of people in my address book.

If the call comes from an unknown number, because it is the "direct line" to the nurse rather than the clinics general number? If the number gives me enough info, I call back to the general number i have in my address book. Too many such numbers lack that ID, so I miss an important call about my medical condition?

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– **Simon_Hill** WIRED STAFF 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **alaskagadfly**

I'm sorry to hear you're having this problem. While blocking calls from unknown numbers is often the only way to effectively combat robocalls I totally understand the anxiety about missing a legitimate call and we shouldn't have to do it. Have you tried any of the carrier or third-party apps I mention?

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– **TelecomExpert** 3 months ago

↩ In reply to **Simon_Hill**

Is Congress still determined not to stop scammers and spammers?

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