



FLORIDA PUBLIC  
SERVICE COMMISSION

## Consumer Bulletin

E. LEON JACOBS, JR.,  
COMMISSIONER

### CRAMMING RULES

With the development of telecommunications competition, telecommunications companies market and bill for services in ways much different than in the past. One such practice is to bill for non-telephone services on their traditional bills to generate revenue. Because of problems in this process, many consumers have filed complaints with the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) related to questionable charges on their bills. One practice that has raised particular concern is called cramming. It occurs when charges appear on a consumer's telephone bill that the consumer did not authorize -- anything from unidentifiable fees to club memberships to charges for website development. These charges are not usually originated by their local telephone company, but by a third party billing agent.

For several years, slamming -- the unauthorized change of a consumer's telephone service -- was by far the top complaint of consumers who contacted the PSC. Recently, however, cramming has begun growing in frequency, and it became necessary for the PSC to begin formulating rules to protect consumers from this illegal practice.

Approximately 2½ years ago, the PSC held a hearing after proposing the nation's strictest rule amendments designed to reduce slamming. The proposed rules were developed from consumer input received during a series of slamming workshops the PSC held throughout Florida, during which we heard many customer concerns about cramming. Consistent with our efforts, the PSC moved quickly by developing rules or safe-

guards to address cramming.

Recently, the PSC proposed rules designed to reduce cramming by requiring complete and accurate disclosure of services and charges on a consumer's telephone bill -- also known as "truth in billing." The rules were voted on by commissioners at a recent Agenda Conference. These rules, we believe, will make it unprofitable to cram Florida's consumers. The proposed rules should go into effect sometime this summer. In addition, we also have several brochures available which inform consumers about cramming and slamming.

Fight back against cramming. If you have a complaint or an issue you would like addressed, we recommend you first discuss it with your telephone company and provide all the necessary facts. If you are not satisfied with the company's response, let the PSC know about it. You may reach us via e-mail at [contact@psc.state.fl.us](mailto:contact@psc.state.fl.us), or visit our homepage at <http://www.floridapsc.com>, or call us at 1-800-342-3552.

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*E. Leon Jacobs, Jr. is a Florida Public Service Commissioner. The PSC sets the rates utility companies charge for natural gas, electric and telephone service within the state. In 36 counties, it sets the price you pay for the water you drink, if your water company is privately-owned.*



### STEPS TO TAKE TO AVOID BEING CRAMMED

- ◆ Thoroughly check your telephone bill to make sure no unauthorized charges have been added.
- ◆ Avoid contests and sweepstakes entries that require your signature. That could be all a company needs to sign you up for new services without your knowledge. If you do sign a sweepstakes entry, carefully read the fine print.
- ◆ Keep a record of all telecommunications services you order. Remember the dates you ordered them and how much you agreed to pay.
- ◆ If you receive a letter or postcard verifying that you have ordered new services but you know you didn't, notify the sending company that you did not authorize the change. Next, call your local telephone company to obtain a list of all services for which you are being billed.
- ◆ If you have access to a computer, you may download the proposed cramming rules at <http://www.psc.state.fl.us/dockets/documents/00/03122-00.html>.