

New Scam Alert: Texts from Your Own Phone Number

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Scams are a sad but common part of the online experience today. And scammers are always hunting for new targets and ways to exploit people.

The latest scheme to trick you into divulging sensitive personal and financial information about yourself is one of the most ominous yet: using your own phone number to text you.

Seemingly harmless and disturbing at the same time, the scam is designed to trick you into thinking your cell phone company is legitimately contacting you about an account or business matter. And they're often offering to "reward" you with a gift of some kind. Unfortunately, with this scam, they are not—and you should be on your guard.

At WCTEL, we take online safety and security very seriously. We are more than just another internet service provider—we are your neighbors, and we believe in looking out for each other.

We explain this unusual and worrisome new text message scam below, including some steps you can take to protect yourself and help crackdown on spam text messages.

The Rise of Text Message Scams

The COVID-19 pandemic increased online scams, including email phishing and spam texting. Scammers targeted individuals during a vulnerable time, taking advantage of the increased isolation and health concerns people were experiencing.

The situation proved so alarming that even the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued an official warning to Americans about the massive growth in text message scams.

One company that tracks phone-related scams reported a 58% increase in spam text messages in 2021—a mind-blowing 87.8 billion spam text messages sent to consumers' cell phones in just one year!

How Text Message Scams Work

Here's how text message scams typically work: scammers will send an SMS text message to your phone, just like they would via a spam email, aiming to get you to click on the accompanying link and lead you to their website or other online domain. For example, they often claim you have won a prize or another reward or gift and need to click on the link to redeem it. Sometimes, they claim that the link will lead you to a company survey to appear more professional.

They proceed to either lure you into giving more personal information about yourself or use advanced technology to "capture" sensitive information about you from your phone. It's not much different from spam email messages that (thankfully) usually end up in your Junk or Spam Email Folder.

What is the New Texting Scam?

Popping up in mid-to-late March 2022, the new scam seems both deceptively simple and ingenious at the same time. What sets it apart from other scams is the scam text message appears to be sent right from your mobile phone number—i.e., the number that your wireless provider established and linked to your account. In short, the scam text message creates the appearance of legitimacy when it is anything but legitimate.

The scam's most reported message reads "Free Msg: Your bill is paid for March" and is accompanied by a link promising a free gift. Others have reported a message linked to a Verizon Customer Service Survey.

Verizon Wireless confirmed the spike in this new scam in late March and later announced that it was working diligently to prevent it from reaching customers. Verizon also indicated that it was notifying federal law enforcement and working with them on the problem, adding more resources to combat this problem.

Scam Text Message Safety and Security Tips

Verizon Wireless recommends forwarding any such texts by texting "S P A M" (7726), where their security experts can further investigate them. We also remind you to follow the FCC's advice to "never share your personal or financial information via email, text messages, or over the phone."

If you receive a text message from a friend or family member containing a link address that doesn't seem right, reach out to them first to ensure their phone number or email isn't hacked. You can also contact federal regulators and law enforcement and file a complaint through the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and its online fraud division, the FCC's complaint department, or even the Internet Crime Complaint Center of the Federal Bureau Investigation (FBI).

WCTEL and its team members are proud to deliver its high-speed fiber internet to your home. But we're part of this community, too, and are pleased to do our part to help make the digital and online world a safer and more secure place to explore and grow along with you.