

# Reducing Junk Mail, Spam and Telemarketing Calls

From the Office of Senator Carl Levin  
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## Reducing Junk Mail

Unsolicited commercial mail can not only be irritating to those who are on the receiving end, but it is also extremely wasteful. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, over 44% of the junk mail we receive enters the waste stream before it has ever been opened or read. In fact, according to the EPA, junk mail produces over 4 million tons of solid waste every year. Many constituents have written or called me to complain about the amount of junk mail they receive. While eliminating junk mail entirely is not as easy as it ought to be, there are ways to reduce the flow to your home. The following suggestions are offered as a service for constituents who want to reduce the amount of junk mail they receive.

### Important steps you can take:

Contact the Direct Marketing Association (DMA): You can contact the DMA and ask them to place your name on their “do not mail” list. Your name will be removed from the mailing lists of several national companies, including credit card companies and mail order clothing catalogs. Although most local businesses and many charitable, religious and political organizations do not participate in the program, you should notice a decrease in the amount of direct mail you receive after a few months. Your address will be kept on file for five years, at which point you will need to provide the DMA with your name and address again. In order to be placed on the DMA’s “do not mail” list, send your full address, including zip code and apartment number, to:

Mail Preference Service  
Attn: Dept: 7374614  
Direct Marketing Association  
P.O. Box 282  
Carmel, New York, 10512

Contact the major credit bureaus: Three major credit bureaus offer a toll-free number that enables you to “opt-out” of having pre-approved credit offers sent to you for two years. This number is 1-888-5-OPTOUT (567-8688). You can also notify the credit bureaus separately that you do not want personal information about you shared for promotional purposes. These addresses are:

Equifax, Inc.  
Options, PO Box 740123  
Atlanta, GA 30374-0123 Experian  
Consumer Opt-Out  
701 Experian Parkway  
Allen, TX 75013 Trans Union  
Marketing List Opt Out  
PO Box 97328  
Jackson, MS 39288

Contact database companies: Several database companies compile names from mail-order catalogs and publishing companies. In many cases, mail order companies you order from sell your name to other mail order companies that send you unsolicited catalogs. Several of these companies have established systems to make it easier for people to stop receiving mail from them. To remove your name from these lists, you should send or e-mail your full name and current address to the following addresses:

Abacus  
PO Box 1478  
Broomfield, CO, 80038  
optout@abacus-direct.com  
Donnelly Marketing  
Data Base Operations  
416 S. Bell  
Ames, Iowa, 50010 Acxiom  
(877) 774-2094  
optout@acxiom.com

Consider the listing you wish to have in the public phone book. This information is public knowledge and some companies will use the phone book to keep track of addresses.

### Steps through the United States Postal Service (USPS)

Should you receive sexually-explicit mail, or other unwanted mail, you may attach the opened piece of mail along with the USPS's Form 1500 and return it to the Post Office. Form 1500 is provided by every post office and will stop the delivery of any material that you find offensive. The USPS will issue an order that no more mailings be sent to you by that mailer.

### Helpful websites

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) developed a webpage to alert consumers to ways they can control unsolicited mail, telemarketing, and e-mail. That website is:  
<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/pubs/alerts/optoutairt.htm>

The Center for Democracy and Technology has a webpage that will insert your address into form letters you can send to groups sending you unwanted mail and gives you some other tips on how to protect your privacy. Their website is:  
<http://www.opt-out.cdt.org>

The U.S. Postal Inspector Service developed a webpage as part of National Consumer Protection Week to help people protect themselves from identity theft. This important advice is at:  
[http://www.usps.com/postalinspectors/idthft\\_ncpw.htm](http://www.usps.com/postalinspectors/idthft_ncpw.htm)

### Getting Rid of Spam E-mail

Almost everyone who has an e-mail address and uses the internet receives e-mail they neither asked for nor desired. In 1999, a repre-

sentative from SBC Internet Service testified to the House Commerce telecommunications subcommittee that 35% of all e-mail transmitted over that company's Internet service was "spam" or unsolicited commercial e-mail (UCE). According to America Online, of the approximately 30 million e-mail messages delivered each day, 30 percent are spam. Not only is spam a nuisance, but it can also increase service rates because Internet Service Providers (ISPs) pass along to consumers the costs of upgrading their systems to handle the large amounts of traffic.

The Senate has not yet addressed any legislation to limit the transmission of spam, but I will certainly review any such proposals when offered. In the meantime, I wanted to provide you with some tips on how to gain control of your e-mail "inbox":

Avoid posting your e-mail address in public places such as websites or chatrooms. Many spammers have programs that search through webpages to identify and collect e-mail addresses. In addition, when choosing an e-mail address, avoid using obvious words such as your first name or last name. You should intersperse your address with numbers.

When a company asks you for your e-mail address, especially mail-order companies, ensure that your e-mail address will not be sold.

Be cautious about responding to a spammer's e-mail or clicking on the "opt-out" option at the bottom of the e-mail. While some "opt-out" buttons will remove you from the sender's list, in many cases your attempts to opt-out will actually end up confirming that your e-mail address is active. In other cases, you will find out that the spammer has not used a legitimate e-mail address and your message will be returned to you. If a "remove me" request is not honored, you can fill out the FTC's online com-

plaint form at <http://www.ftc.gov> and your complaint will be made available to hundreds of law enforcement and consumer protection agencies.

Most e-mail servers will allow you to set up filters. Some service providers simply allow you to click on a “block address” link next to the sender’s name, thereby prohibiting the sender from sending future mail to you. Other e-mail services will allow you to set up filters so that they automatically delete certain e-mails coming into your inbox. For example, you can set up filters that stop e-mails from certain senders or with subject lines like “low mortgage rates” or “best offer.” You should look at your server’s “Help” option to find out how to do this.

If you find a message especially offensive, or if it seems to present a fraudulent offer, you may file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) on their website, [https://rn.ftc.gov/dod/wsolcq\\$.startup?Z\\_ORG\\_CODE=PU01](https://rn.ftc.gov/dod/wsolcq$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU01) or by forwarding the e-mail to [uce@ftc.gov](mailto:uce@ftc.gov).

### Controlling Telemarketers

At one time or another, most people have had a dinner or an early Saturday morning interrupted by someone trying to sell them something. It is estimated the telemarketing industry is a \$720 billion business. In response to evidence of increasing fraud and abuse associated with the rapidly growing number of businesses selling products over the telephone, Congress enacted several laws designed to protect consumers.

You can now put your phone number on the Federal Trade Commission’s national “do not call” registry. Telemarketers will be required to search the registry and honor the wishes of consumers who don’t want to be called. To register your phone number on the national “do not call” registry, you can go to the FTC’s “do not call” website at <http://www.donotcall.gov> The FCC is also discuss-

ing whether to create their own national “do not call” list. Such a list would apply to industries not regulated by the FTC. You can find more information at:

<http://ftp.fcc.gov/cgb/policy/telemarketing.html>

The two major laws Congress enacted to deal with telemarketers are the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991 (TCPA, P.L.102-243) and the Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act (P.L.103-297). The TCPA mandated that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) develop rules to regulate telemarketers under its jurisdiction, including banks, credit unions, and insurance companies, while the Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act mandated that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) develop rules to regulate groups under its jurisdiction. Both agencies prohibit telemarketers from calling consumers without prior consent before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m. and from calling consumers who tell the caller they do not want to be called again. According to the rules, telemarketing companies have to respect “do not call” requests made by residential consumers for ten years.

In September 2002, the FCC announced they were reviewing the rules of the TCPA to see what, if anything, should be changed to better protect consumers. For more information, you can go to <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/tcpa.html>