

"Ring and Run" Scam Hitting Your Wallet

Written by WCSO Press Release
Thursday, 06 February 2014 06:50

There's yet another scam that will take your cash just by raising your curiosity. Watauga Sheriff Len Hagaman passed along a bulletin on the new trick criminals are using, simply by calling their victims. Intended victims receive a call on their phones, usually from area code 473, which rings once and then disconnects. This arouses the call-recipient's natural curiosity – "who just called me and from where?" But a call back will cost you—usually over \$20 for the first minute, according to the release. Sometimes the caller actually allows the phone to ring long enough for the victim to answer, after which the caller—or the caller's robocaller system—makes groaning sounds or otherwise indicates that he or she is in distress and then hangs up, enticing the victim to wonder what is going on and call back. Hagaman says if either of these happens to you – don't call back.

While area code 473 may appear to be domestic, it is not. This area code was created in the late 1990s for the islands of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique, which, like the United States, use country code 1. Calls placed to 473 numbers are international calls and can be quite expensive – and, because the criminals sometimes establish the number which the victim sees on his or her caller ID as a premium service number – the rate can exceed \$20 for the first minute.

473 is not the only area code from which this scam has been perpetrated. Beware calls coming in from area codes 809, 284, 649 and 876, which like 473 are international, and are known to have been used for similar scams. Of course, if you do not have a calling plan that includes calls to Canada, there are many other area codes for which you could be billed international dialing rates, but so-called "one ring," "ring and run," or "dial and disconnect" scams are not typically perpetrated using Canadian numbers.

If you have voicemail – as pretty much everyone does today – there is usually no reason to call back missed calls from numbers that you do not recognize, regardless of the area code from which they originated. If a caller has something important to say, he or she can leave a message identifying himself or herself (or send you a text message). Don't let curiosity get the best of you.

"Ring and run" scams are not new; when 900 numbers and pagers were popular in the days before the proliferation of the Internet and cell phones (it's hard to believe that was less than a generation ago), criminals would page people asking them to return calls to such numbers. Eventually, people learned not to call back anyone with a 900 number. Likewise, until shortly before the turn of the century, the Caribbean islands using the American country code 1 all used the same area code, 809; scams were perpetrated, but, after a while, people learned to avoid calling that single area code. The latest crop of scams exploits the advances in technology – the implementation of many new area codes makes it difficult for most people to recognize what is a domestic number and what is not, and the proliferation of cellphones (rather than pagers) means that sounds of trouble can be played to victims, exploiting their caring about others in distress.

The criminals' new tactic reinforces the need for people to be aware of international area codes within the US country code of 1 – after all, how difficult would it be for criminals to leave a voicemail claiming to be a collection agency, doctor, police department, or other "real sounding" party and ask the recipient to call back at some domestic-sounding, but international, phone number? How many people would likely fall prey to such a scam?

While 809, 473, 284, 649 and 876, may be the primary sources of the current danger, here is a

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list of (non-Canadian) area codes that are international. All but a few are relatively new, having been split off from 809 in the late 1990s.