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Forum: Officials react to 911 swatting but fail to connect root problem

By Bill Murray Published 7:14 pm, Friday, February 6, 2015

Caller ID has been a long-standing nightmare for the consumer. Organized gangs of thieves routinely call people at their homes or on their cell phones. The thieves almost always alter the caller identification number and attempt many types of fraudulent offers. The offers they promote range from credit card offers to collage loan reduction. Some of the offers state they are Microsoft and your computer has a virus. The insidious nature of the calls, however, is an attempt to steal the identity of the person answering the call. This is done though asking for the information or seeking access to a person's computer. The result is more often than not to commit identity theft and costing both money and time attempting to rectify the loss.

The police are overburdened with fake 911 calls. The process is called swatting. As a result the victim has a SWAT team dispatched to their home. The 911 system relies on the telephone system's phone number to address database. The dispatch will then deploy the SWAT team, thinking they are on a life-threatening emergency, endangering the lives of both the police and the homeowner.

The 911 system relies on the location information to be correct. Virtually any cellular phone can override the GPS position though a number of freely downloaded applications. This information is then sent along with the 911 call. The cellular tower used, however, should override the location information. The carriers are more interested in making a profit than the personal security of their customers.

The **Federal Trade Commission's** "Do not call registry" is overburdened with complaints. Last year the FTC set up a contest to enlist the hacker community to help combat the problem. It invented a game with cash prizes called "Zapping Rachel." It was apparent at the Defcon yearly hacker convention in Las Vegas that the FTC also did not fully understand the problem with caller ID. When the FTC asked about the issue it claimed that it was powerless to compel the telephone carriers to assist in combatting the problem.

Late last year I contacted my own carrier. After spending three hours talking to various people in the security division, they made it clear that they were aware of the issue but were not interested in correcting the problem. I personally get called several times a month. I know that the phone numbers are not valid by simply calling the number back. The message from the carrier states that the number is disconnected or is no longer in service.

The telephone carriers have the ability to correct this problem themselves. The system used to verify the route a call made to ensure its quality. The programs are still in the central computer of the telephone carriers. There will not be a correction to this problem until the telephone carriers get on the ball and do something about verifying caller ID numbers at the local switch. Perhaps regulators could create pressure. Either way it needs to be fixed for us all.

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