

SMS Sender Registration Scheme to be Launched on December 28 to assist in combating SMS scams

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) today (December 20) announced that the SMS Sender Registration Scheme will first be implemented in the telecommunications sector from December 28, with a view to helping members of the public verify the identities of SMS senders and beware of call and SMS scams.

Under the Scheme, all Registered Senders will use Registered SMS Sender IDs with the prefix "#" to send SMS messages to local subscribers of mobile services. The Scheme will first cover the telecommunications sector. Members of the public may visit the OFCA's website (www.ofca.gov.hk/ssrs) to check the list of the first batch of telecommunications service providers participating in the Scheme (see Annex).

A spokesman for the OFCA said that the OFCA has always been committed to, from the perspective of telecommunications services, assisting the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) in combating fraudulent calls and SMS messages. Following the establishment of the working group with the HKPF and the telecommunications sector in early September last year to jointly study and implement a series of feasible technical measures, the launch of the Scheme will further help stop fraudsters from masquerading as telecommunications service providers in sending SMS messages to mobile service users.

"The Scheme aims at helping members of the public identify Registered SMS Senders to stop fraudsters from sending scam SMS messages masquerading as other companies or organisations. Taking the telecommunications sector which is the first batch of participants in the Scheme as an example, only those telecommunications service providers being Registered Senders under the Scheme will be able to send SMS messages using their Registered SMS Sender IDs with the prefix '#'," the spokesman said.

The spokesman added that other SMS messages with sender IDs containing "#" but not sent by Registered Senders will be blocked by the telecommunications networks. Subscribers of mobile services are not required to apply for the service, install any mobile apps or change their handset settings. The Scheme is not applicable to SMS messages of which receiving parties are expected to reply to the senders via phone numbers.

The OFCA reminds that under all circumstances, members of the public should stay highly vigilant when receiving SMS messages from unknown senders, and must not disclose to unidentified senders any personal information, bank account numbers or credit card details, transfer money or access any hyperlink in the SMS messages, to avoid suffering any loss. Should there be any doubt, they should report it to the HKPF immediately.

The OFCA will closely monitor the implementation of the Scheme and will discuss with other sectors and government departments to encourage more sectors that use SMS to communicate with customers to participate in the Scheme, to further expand the Scheme and to assist law enforcement agencies in combating scam activities.

The OFCA will also continue to collaborate with the HKPF and the telecommunications sector to enhance education and publicity in a comprehensive manner to ensure that anti-fraud messages can be delivered to all members of the public to remind them to always stay vigilant upon receipt of calls and messages.