

As the Times reports today, we are making bosses of companies...

Bosses face £500k fine in nuisance call crackdown

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Directors of companies that make nuisance calls will face fines of up to £500,000 under a government move to hold them personally responsible.

Ministers have pushed to make directors liable as evidence emerged that companies are choosing to wind up and then register under a new name rather than pay big financial penalties.

The data protection watchdog revealed last week that it had failed to recover 46 per cent of the £178 million in fines since 2010, due to liquidations.

Britons were bombarded with almost four million nuisance calls and texts last year, according to Ofcom estimates. Another study, commissioned by the insurance company Aviva, put the figure at 2.2 billion, or 4,200 calls and messages every minute.

The government will begin a consultation today on proposals that mean that on top of the fine of up to £500,000 on a business, the same can be levied by

the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) on company directors.

Ministers first announced the proposal in October 2016 but it was held up by the snap election and plans to update the UK's data protection framework, according to a Whitehall source.

The ICO describes nuisance calls as unwanted marketing that attempts to promote a product, service, aim or ideal. They can be live or automated.

Margot James, the digital and creative industries minister, described the calls as a "blight on society", adding: "For too long a minority of company directors have escaped justice by liquidating their firms and opening up again under a different name."

Last year a company fined a record amount for making almost 100 million nuisance calls in 18 months was placed into liquidation. Keurboom Communications caused "upset and distress" with its automated calls and was fined £400,000. Gregory Rudd, 52, its director, wound it up soon after.

The calls related to schemes such as

road accident claims and compensation for mis-sold payment protection insurance and prompted more than 1,000 complaints to the ICO.

Mr Rudd was also a director of Allied Telecommunications that was linked in 2005 to 16 companies fined £1.3 million for thousands of nuisance calls. It was also placed into liquidation.

Consumers aged over 65 received more unsolicited calls than any other age group, with 30 per cent of this group saying they had been targeted, according to a study last year. In March the ICO declared that a company suspected of making 200 million illegal nuisance calls potentially risked lives by clogging a safety line for people at unmanned level crossings in Scotland.

While complaints about the calls to the ICO and Ofcom have been falling year-on-year since 2015, more than 33,585 were still recorded last year. The government has tried to tackle the problem by forcing companies to display their number and increasing fines for rule breaches on direct marketing.

As the Times reports today, we are making bosses of companies which bother people with nuisance calls personally responsible if their firm breaks the law.