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Stay aware of utility service scams

It is the world we live in today – the necessity to pause and consider before we click, answer or respond to someone seeking information. No industry, person or business is off limits to scammers, who even try to con their way into the utility industry.

The Better Business Scam Tracker reports that victims usually lose \$274 in all types of scams and \$500 in a utility scams.

When it comes to power bills, scammers make threatening phone calls to consumers to demand immediate payment or else, like shutting off their service. This deceiving claim is often made during the height of summer or winter, when people want to stay comfortable during the extreme heat or cold.

However, utilities typically send initial disconnection notices in writing.

Utility scams: How they get you

Scammers request that immediate payment be wired, loaded on a reloadable gift card or debit card or sent using cryptocurrency (a digital money system that does not rely on banks for verification). Only scammers request this type of payment and threaten immediate service disconnection. Do not provide any information, including your utility account number, or agree to immediate payment. Instead, hang up and check with your utility by using the phone number listed on your power bill. Fake numbers and links can appear in emails and texts. Do not click on the links.

Utility bills that double the amount due may be a utility scam. Utilities are closely regulated and may not have the right to raise prices substantially. Consumers should trust their gut reaction; if it seems like a fraud, it probably is.

Protect personal information

When supplying your utility (or any business or person) with sensitive information such as a social



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security number, proof of address or death certificate, do not email the information. Additionally, do not give out sensitive information to anyone who calls you. Verify the phone number and call the utility directly to discuss any matter that would involve providing personal information. In general, some companies do have password-protected, secure methods to obtain personal information via an app or portal, but always verify this before using.

At your door

Door-to-door scams may involve impersonators of utility workers saying the meter is broken or offering to perform other repairs or an energy audit – all at the consumer's cost. Your utility will contact you in advance, prior to arriving at your home for service or for any other reason. Do not let someone in the house without a pre-approved appointment.

Scams in general

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) warns that phishing emails and texts attempt to convince individuals to make payments or provide personal information. Thieves use stolen information to open accounts and pass charges on to the victim.

Caller ID can fib

Over the phone, calls appearing to be local are not always an accurate assessment of who is calling. AARP has a fraud watch network that provides alerts of new frauds; do an internet search for the fraud watch network to learn more.

Scams are everywhere

No matter the scam, the goal of the scammer is to gather personal information. Stay safe: Do not share Social Security numbers, account details, credit card numbers, bank information, death certificates or birth date. Thieves can use this information to steal their victim's identity.

If you become a victim of a scam, report it to the local police and your bank. Consumers can protect themselves by blocking unknown callers and keeping software updated on phones and computers.

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