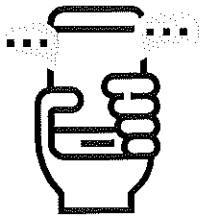
Top 10 Impostor Utility Scams



HANG UP ON PHONE SCAMS

Disconnection Deception

Scammers call threatening disconnection of your utility service, demanding immediate payment by prepaid cards purchased at a local retail store (or credit card, debit card, bank draft, wiring money, etc.), and insisting you call them back with the card information to make payment. Your utility will send you one or more disconnection notices in the mail before disconnecting or shutting off your utility service, and they will offer several bill payment options without specifying the type of payment you need to make.

Bill Payment or Credit Con

Scammers may provide you with a phony account routing number for you to use to pay your utility bills, receive a credit, or obtain federal assistance. In exchange for personal information that can be used for identity theft, you may get a payment account number. If the number is entered during an online transaction, it may appear that your bill is paid, but no funds are actually paid to the utility, the account balance remains due, and you may be charged a returned payment fee by your utility.

Equipment or Repair Bogus Fee

Scammers call demanding a separate payment to replace or install a utility-related device or meter. If a utility needs to upgrade or replace a piece of equipment, it will contact you ahead of time as a courtesy. If there is a charge related to work on equipment you might own, it will typically be included in your monthly bill as the utility does not collect a separate payment for equipment or installation.

Overpayment Trick

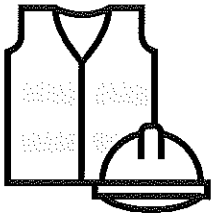
Scammers call claiming you have overpaid your utility bill, and you need to provide personal bank account information or a credit card number to facilitate a refund. Your utility may apply any overpayments you have made to your utility account, allowing the credit balance to cover any future charges, or refund any overpayment by mailing a check.

Power Restoration Rip Off

Scammers call offering to restore power quickly or in a preferential order for immediate payment or an upfront "reconnection fee," typically in the aftermath of hurricanes and other severe storms causing widespread power outages. Utilities do not require payment to restore electricity, water, or natural gas service after a natural disaster or other related outage, though some utilities will accept in-person payment via check or phone payment after a disconnection for non-payment.

Smishing Scam

Smishing, short for SMS phishing, is a relatively new scam that attempts to trick mobile phone users into giving scammers personal information, which can be used for identity theft, via a text or SMS message. Scammers like smishing, as consumers tend to be more inclined to trust text messages. Utility companies typically do not text you unless you have signed up for a specific notification service offered by your utility.



SHUT THE DOOR ON IMPOSTOR IN-PERSON SCAMS

Contractor Con

Scammers posing as utility workers or contractors affiliated with your utility may knock on your door claiming to be employed or hired by the utility company to reset, repair, replace, or inspect your utility meter or other utility-related device. If a utility employee or authorized contractor needs access to your home, an appointment will be scheduled in advance, and proper identification will be provided for your review.

Home Improvement Huckster

Scammers posing as utility workers may appear unannounced at your front door offering a free energy audit, efficiency inspection, water quality or pressure testing, or some other service. These unsolicited intruders may be pitching unnecessary expensive products or attempting to steal items from you. Unless your utility company has notified you in advance, or you initiated a request for such a service, do not let them into your home or business.

Leak Lie

Scammers posing as utility workers may knock on your door claiming that there is a major gas or water leak in the area and that they need to come inside to check the pipes or lines. They may try to collect your personal information for later identity theft, or distract you to remove valuables from your home. A utility company will typically call you in advance to set an appointment for such a service.

DELETE SUSPICIOUS EMAIL SCAMS

Bogus Bills

Scammers send suspicious emails that appear to be a bill sent by your utility company, potentially featuring your utility's logo and color scheme. Do not click on any links or attachments in any email unless you have verified the sender. You may be directed to a scam website designed to steal your personal information, or you might install malicious software onto your computer without ever knowing it. Utility companies typically send bills by mail, unless you have opted to receive your bill by email.

General Tips to Avoid Impostor Utility Scams

PROTECT PERSONAL INFORMATION

Never provide or confirm personal information (Social Security number, date of birth) or financial information (banking account information, debit or credit card information) to anyone initiating contact with you, whether by phone, in-person, or email, claiming to be a utility company representative. If your utility leaves you a message or contacts you by phone, it will typically ask to speak to the person whose name is listed on the account, and if you call your utility, it may ask for some personal information to confirm your identity for your protection. Never give out information or provide any payment type to any callers or unexpected individual(s) appearing at your home or business claiming to represent your utility. Your utility will have your relevant personal and account information.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Do not be rushed. If someone calls, appears, or emails saying you have to pay your bill immediately to avoid disconnection, tell them you would like to verify that they are a legitimate utility company representative by calling a verified number for the utility company. Beware if a caller or in-person representative exhibits impatience, annoyance, or anger when you question their authority. Notice if their emotion intensifies when you ask to speak with their manager, request their phone number, or offer to call back later. While a scammer will discourage you from hanging up and calling the number on your utility bill, a real utility representative will encourage you to do so for your own peace of mind.

ALWAYS ASK QUESTIONS

Ask the person calling you or visiting you in person to provide you with your account number, your last payment amount, date of payment, and his/her employee identification number. If he/she is a legitimate utility representative, this information will be readily accessible. If not, hang up or shut the door, and call your utility. Before you provide any information or purchase any product from someone appearing at your home or business, independently confirm the authenticity of the representative's business by researching it online—verify the website and contact information and search for customer reviews and company policies.

REPORT THE SCAM TO YOUR UTILITY

Know that your questions may scare the scammer off. If not, document what the scammer told you, including the name they provided you, the date and time you spoke with them, their caller ID number, their employee identification number, the method and amount of payment they requested, any phone number they requested you call to pay your bill, and any other details that might aid in a possible criminal investigation. If you purchased

a prepaid card and provided the card's number to the scammer for payment, record the prepaid card number as well. Call your utility immediately to inform them of the scam, and give this information to your utility when you call. If you want to check on your account, call your utility's phone number provided on your monthly bill, or on their website, or log into your account on the website.

PAY YOUR UTILITY ONLY

Never make a utility bill payment to anyone calling you on the phone, coming to your door (unless that is a verified bill payment method used by your utility company), texting you, or emailing you. Always call your utility company, at the number provided on your bill or on the utility's website, if you have a question about payment or billing information. Know your utility bill payment options—online, by phone, automatic bank draft, mail, or in person. Never wire money or give the number from a prepaid card to someone you do not know. Once you do, you cannot get your money back. Be suspicious if the caller is requiring the use of a specific payment option, like a prepaid card, as utilities never ask or require a customer to purchase a prepaid card to avoid disconnection.

STAY UPDATED ON SCAMS

Review guides like this, local news reports and websites, utility and trade association websites (including www.UtilitiesUnited.org), local law enforcement websites, state attorneys general websites, federal government websites, consumer information websites, and research incoming phone numbers you do not recognize. Scammers are constantly updating their tactics, and you will need to stay educated on new types of scams and tips to avoid them. Pass on information about impostor electric, water, and natural gas scams to people you know.