

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Consumer alert: Imposter scam: Fake utility calls

Posted on Thursday, Aug 23, 2018

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MADISON - Imposter scammers are posing as a local utility company in order to demand money for supposed late payments or required upgrades. Wisconsin residents should be on the lookout for threatening calls about their gas or electric accounts and hang up on anyone who demands an immediate payment on behalf of the local utility provider.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's (DATCP) Consumer Protection Hotline has received more than two dozen reports in the last 24 hours from Wisconsin Public Service (WPS) customers about these phony calls. The crooks threaten call recipients with disconnection of services unless an immediate payment is made, and some of the scammers mentioned a work order number, truck number, and phone number to make their story seem more legitimate. One caller reported being threatened with bodily harm.

While most of these recent reports to DATCP have been about contacts from fake WPS representatives, DATCP has also received reports about imposter WE Energies calls. This scam is very common and con artists will claim to work for whatever utility company services the area they are targeting. Regardless of your utility provider, if you receive a similar threatening call about your home or business utility account, hang up and do not engage the caller.

Avoid being tricked by remembering these simple guidelines:

- Utility companies will contact you by mail if your account is overdue. They may also call you if your services are at risk of being terminated, but will NEVER demand immediate payment over the phone.
- If a caller demands a utility payment by prepaid debit card, gift card, or wire transfer, it is a scam.
- Scammers can manipulate your caller ID display to show the local utility company's name or number when they call.
- Contact your utility provider directly using information from your billing statement to inquire about the status of your account and to report the call.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <http://datcp.wi.gov>, send an e-mail to datcphotline@wi.gov, or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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