

Summer Scams Heating Up, Consumers are Warned

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New scams involving meter readings and invalid checks are targeting electric cooperative members. (Photo By: Getty Images)

Scammers don't take summer vacations, as several electric cooperatives can attest. Reported efforts to rip off consumers have been picking up in recent weeks, including one making claims of incorrect meter readings and another citing invalid checks.

Nebraska's Howard Greeley Rural Public Power District wrote on its Facebook page that some residents "have been getting calls that the meter reading has been wrong for a few months and that they need your address to send you a check."

"IT IS A SCAM!! If we have your meter reading we also have your address," the St. Paul-based utility wrote. What the scammers really plan to do with the addresses isn't known.

Howard Greeley is among the members of the Nebraska Rural Electric Association urging consumers to be alert. On its own Facebook page, the statewide noted it's seen "a large number of recent phone scam incidents reported around Nebraska."

"If you receive a call from someone claiming to be with your local electric utility, don't give them any personal or financial information. Instead, hang up and call your electric utility right away!" they wrote. "Your electric provider will never ask for a pre-paid card to pay your bill—that is what many scammers ask for in the calls!"

In David City, Nebraska, Butler Public Power District warned members of calls threatening disconnection unless payment is made immediately. That attracted the notice of the Butler County Sheriff's Office, which posted on its Facebook feed that it's received numerous complaints about calls—supposedly from BPPD or other local utilities—"requesting cash payments or customers will face an immediate disconnect of their power."

"This is a scam!" the sheriff noted, before taking to all caps to warn, "DO NOT GIVE ANY INFORMATION TO ANYONE OVER THE PHONE."

That's sound advice in neighboring Colorado, where La Plata Electric Association says someone claiming to be from the co-op is calling members, saying the payment check they sent wasn't valid and they need to give a credit or debit card on the spot to keep the lights on.

"The scammers called members late in the afternoon, which is apparently part of the now traditional scam to panic them. Of course our consumer-members do not want to be without electricity overnight," said Ron Meier, LPEA manager of engineering and member services.

Meier noted that the Durango-based co-op never makes these types of calls, nor does it disconnect power outside of regular business hours or on weekends.

Across the border in New Mexico, Cloudcroft-based Otero Electric Cooperative warned of callers threatening disconnects unless members buy a gift card at Family Dollar to make a payment. While the co-op does call members with past-due accounts to give a final due date, it never demands immediate payment.