



**Hawaiian Electric
Maui Electric
Hawai'i Electric Light**



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hawai'i utilities join forces against aggressive scammers, alert customers during Utility Scam Awareness Week

HONOLULU, Nov. 14, 2018 – Hawai'i residents and small businesses are losing thousands of dollars to increasingly aggressive thieves and scam artists posing as utility workers and bill collectors. As part of national Utility Scam Awareness Week, local utilities, police and consumer experts are joining forces to prevent customers from being scammed.

The Hawaiian Electric Companies, Hawaiian Telcom, Hawai'i Gas, Board of Water Supply and Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative have partnered with the state Office of Consumer Protection and Honolulu Police Department to combat scammers who target utility customers. Customers need to be alert and recognize scams, especially when criminals threaten to disconnect service unless a payment is made.

“Unfortunately, scammers are always looking for potential victims, and the utility scam is one of the common ruses,” said Honolulu Police Deputy Chief John McCarthy. “Whenever you receive a phone call or email or letter that sounds suspicious or out of the ordinary, always check with the organization or business before making any payment or giving out personal financial information. You don't want criminals to get your hard earned money.”

Scammers are targeting customers who rely on vital services such as electricity, water, gas and telecommunications. And utilities often see a spike in scams during the holidays.

The utilities offer the following tips:

- If the caller says your utility account is delinquent and threatens to shut off service immediately unless payment is made, it's a scam.
- If someone calls from a utility demanding immediate payment over the phone, via money transfer, prepaid debit cards or by Bitcoin, it's a scam.
- If the caller asks to meet the customer in person to pick up a payment, it's a scam.
- If you receive an email from your utility urging you to click on an embedded link or attachment to resolve a utility issue or pay a bill, think before you click. It's likely a scam.
- If a utility worker shows up at your home or place of business, ensure that person is wearing official attire with a logo, driving a properly labeled vehicle and carrying company identification. When in doubt, call the utility's customer service center.

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Don't Get Scammed

Scam artists often target utility customers who cannot go without vital services such as electricity, water, gas and telecommunications. They threaten to shut off service if customers don't agree to pay up. Utility customers need to be alert – especially during the holidays.



THREATENING DISCONNECTION – Scammers call, email or visit customers to extort money and use high-pressure tactics such as threatening immediate disconnection of service if the customer doesn't pay “overdue” bills.

Best defense: Just hang up! Do not provide personal, confidential or financial information. Call the utility's customer service center number printed on your bill or listed on the company's website to check the status of your account and report the scam. If you dial the number listed on your caller ID, you'll reach the scammer.



DEMANDING PAYMENT – Scammers often demand “overdue” payment by money transfer, prepaid card or Bitcoin, but no utility accepts these forms of payment.

Best defense: Just hang up! Do not agree to the scammer's' terms. Research the available payment options offered by the utility.



GOING “PHISHING”: Scammers send emails that urge customers to click on an embedded link or attachment to resolve a utility-related issue, update information or pay for a utility bill.

Best defense: Think before you click. If you're not expecting an email from the utility, contact customer service to verify the email before opening or clicking.



IMPERSONATING UTILITY WORKERS: Scam artists pretend to be from a utility and go to homes or businesses in order to gain entry and steal from customers.

Best defense: Make sure the worker is driving an official utility vehicle, wearing a uniform with a logo and carrying valid identification. When in doubt, call customer service to verify the employee and the work being done.

