

Utility Billing Scam

Imagine receiving a phone call from your utility company saying it intends to shut off your electricity. The only way you can avoid disconnection of service, you are told, is to make an immediate payment using a debit card or an online payment service such as PayPal or GreenDot. If you have Caller ID on your phone, it may look like the call is coming from the utility. You wonder, “Did I forget to pay this bill? Maybe I should make a payment just to be safe.”



Don't do it! This is a scam, set up to take your money in a way that prevents you from being able to get it back.

Scammers can use computers to make it look like they're calling from one place, when, in fact, they are someplace else. If you get a call, email or text from somebody that demands immediate payment using a debit card or a specific online payment service to avoid having your utility service disconnected, it's probably a scam.

If you are not sure whether you have paid your bill, hang up and call the utility company directly to ask if you have a past due bill. Use the number given on your utility bill or found on the utility's website, not a call-back number given by whoever contacted you and threatened to shut off service.

Utilities offer many payment options, and will advise you on how you can pay bills by phone or online while keeping your personal financial information safe. Utilities never insist that you use a specific form of payment, such as a debit card.

The Idaho Public Utilities Commission requires utilities to follow certain procedures before service can be disconnected. Those rules apply to [regulated utilities](#) that provide electric, natural gas, water and wireline telephone service in Idaho. Although utilities do call customers with past due bills before service is disconnected, that phone call is the last step in a lengthy effort to obtain payment. Written notices are sent to customers before that phone call is made. If collection efforts fail, a utility can shut off service. Before service can be disconnected, a utility technician will attempt to contact the customer in person at the home or business, identify himself or herself as a utility employee, and provide a final opportunity to pay.

If you have been the target of a scam, contact the Idaho Public Utilities Commission at (800) 432-0369 or (208) 334-0369 or by using the Consumer Assistance Form at www.puc.idaho.gov.