

News from the Illinois Commerce Commission / Illinois Attorney General

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Attorney General Madigan, ICC Warn Utility Customers of Scam Artists Posing as Utility Company Reps, Demanding Payment

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and the Illinois Commerce Commission alerted utility customers to a recent scam targeting residents in the Chicago area in which someone claiming to be a utility employee asks for immediate payment of a bill either at a customer's door, over the telephone or by e-mail.

The ICC has received complaints from utility customers about scam artists claiming to be utility representatives, telling customers that their service will be disconnected unless payment is made directly to the scammers. The scammer may direct the consumer to purchase a prepaid credit card, "Cash Card" and to call them back with the personal identification number (PIN). The stories can vary, for example, with the scammer saying that the customer's billing cycle has changed and payment must be made immediately, that the account is past due and payment can be made to them directly to avoid disconnection of the utility service, or the customer's previous payment was rejected or never received.

"If someone appears at your door claiming to be from your utility company and asking for immediate payment of your bill, I would slam the door in their face, call the police and contact your utility company directly. Utility companies do not go door-to-door collecting payments," Madigan said. "Any consumer who has provided their personal information to make an on-the-spot payment to someone claiming to represent a utility company should contact my office's Consumer Fraud Bureau with the details."

ICC Chairman Doug Scott urged consumers to always ask for identification from those who knock on their door offering a "service." "Scam artists are good at what they do, so arm yourself with information before doing business with anyone who comes to your door or calls you on the telephone. Ask for identification and if doesn't look right to you, it probably isn't. You don't have to do business with anyone who shows up at your door or calls you asking for personal information," Scott said. "Contact the utility and check it out for yourself."

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The Attorney General and the ICC offer these reminders to utility customers:

*Never provide personal information to anyone who comes to the door or calls you claiming to be a representative of the utility.

*Contact the utility at the phone number listed on your bill to confirm the caller or the representative at your home is a verifiable employee of the utility. Do not call a different number suggested by the potential scammer.

*Utility field personnel in Illinois do not take payments from consumers. Be on guard with anyone who asks for your personal information, or says you must pay immediately and suggests a method to get the money quickly.

If you suspect you have been scammed, have a suspicious incident to report or have questions, contact the Attorney General's office at 1-800-386-5438 or the ICC at 1-800-524-0795.