



PRESS RELEASE

Attorney General Brian Frosh and BGE Join Together for Annual Utility Scam Awareness Day

BALTIMORE, MD (November 20, 2019) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh is joining with BGE to promote awareness of utility service scams and provide helpful advice for avoiding them. In the last three years, 61 utility scam complaints have been received by the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division. Some victims have reported losing as much as \$4,000 dollars to a utility service scam.

For the fourth year in a row, BGE is joining more than 140 energy companies across the United States and Canada in the effort to protect customers from scams targeting customers of electric, natural gas, water, and other utilities. Collaborating energy companies have joined together and designated November 20 as “Utilities United Against Scams Day.” This effort is supported by a week-long campaign, including social media and online content, focused on exposing the tricks scammers use to steal money from customers, and how customers can protect themselves. The effort, which includes industry organizations such as Edison Electric Institute and American Gas Association, encourages companies to share these messages to help guard against scam and imposter activity.

“Utility scammers use fear and intimidation to get you to believe your electricity, water, or other utility shut off is imminent,” said Attorney General Frosh. “Legitimate utilities would never give only one hour’s notice. These scammers don’t just go after individuals; business owners should also be suspicious if they receive a call or visit from someone threatening to shut off a utility. Always contact the utility directly using the telephone number on your bill if you suspect there is problem.”

“Utilities United Against Scams Day is very important for BGE,” said Rodney Oddoye, vice president and chief customer officer for BGE. “Unfortunately, scammers are constantly changing their tactics, which is why it is so important that our customers have tools and information to help them avoid becoming victims.”

It is not uncommon for scammers to call, text, or email utility customers asking for immediate payment to avoid service disconnection. As a reminder, utilities will never send a single notification to a customer within one hour of a service interruption, and they never will ask their customers to make payments with a pre-paid debit card, gift card, or any form of cryptocurrency.

Scammers have even duplicated the upfront Interactive Voice Response system of some companies, so when customers call the number provided by the scammer, it sounds like a

legitimate business. Some scammers also use caller ID “spoofing” to replicate a utility's phone number.

Red flags for scam activity

- The scammer often becomes angry and tells a customer his or her account is past due and service will be shut off if a large payment isn't made—usually within less than an hour.
- The scammer instructs the customer to purchase a prepaid debit or credit card—widely available at most retail stores—then call him or her back to make a payment.
- The scammer asks the customer for the prepaid card's receipt number and PIN number, which grants instant access to the funds loaded to the card.

How to protect yourself

- Utility representatives will never ask or require a customer with a past due balance to purchase a prepaid debit card to avoid disconnection.
- Customers can make payments online, by phone, automatic bank withdrawal, mail, or in person.
- Customers with a past due balance will receive multiple shut off notifications—never a single notification one hour before disconnection.
- If a customer ever questions the legitimacy of the call, hang up and call BGE at 800-685-0123 or your utility service provider if you maintain service through another utility.

Don't Get Scammed. Customers can avoid being scammed by taking a few precautions:

- **Never provide your social security number or personal information** to anyone initiating contact with you claiming to be a utility representative or requesting you to send money to another person or entity other than your local utility providers.
- **Always ask to see a company photo ID** before allowing any utility worker into your home or business.
- **Never make a payment for services to anyone coming to your door.**

Any customer who believes he or she has been a target of a scam is urged to contact their local police and call BGE immediately at 800-685-0123 or your utility service provider to report the situation. You can also contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 410-528-8662 or 888-743-0023 (toll free) to report the scam attempt or if you believe you have been a victim of a scam.