

Consumer alert: Utility customers should be aware of ongoing scams

DENVER -- In light of recent reports, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and the Colorado Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC), two divisions within the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA), are alerting Coloradans to scams being perpetrated on utility consumers during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Unfortunately, scammers haven't taken a break during this public health crisis, and utility customers may be especially vulnerable. If a utility customer receives any call threatening an immediate shutoff, it is a scam. While most utilities have recently resumed normal collection activity, including the potential disconnection of service, they will work with any customer to arrange a payment plan that meets their circumstances.

Colorado consumers can obtain information about their specific utility provider's policies in response to COVID-19 at this link: [Statewide Utility Measures Undertaken in Response to COVID-19](#).

Signs of a Scam:

- **Disconnection Deception:** Scammers call threatening disconnection of your utility service, demanding immediate payment by prepaid cards purchased at a local retail store (or credit card, debit card, bank draft, wiring money, etc.) and insisting you call them back. This may also be done in person or via email.
- **Contractor Con:** Scammers posing as utility workers or contractors affiliated with your utility may knock on your door claiming to be employed or hired by the utility company to read, upgrade, reset, repair, replace, or inspect your utility meter or other utility-related device.
- **Bogus Bills:** Scammers send suspicious emails that appear to be a bill sent by your utility company, potentially featuring your utility's logo and color scheme.

How Customers Can Protect Themselves:

- Customers should never purchase a prepaid card to avoid service disconnection or shut off. Legitimate utility companies do not specify how customers should make a bill payment and always offer a variety of ways to pay a bill, including accepting payments online, by phone, automatic bank draft, mail, or in person. Utilities do not demand immediate payment over the phone. Further, companies never send a single notification one hour or less before disconnection.
- At this time, utilities are not sending employees into homes to read in-home meters in an effort to promote social distancing to prevent further spread of the virus. Anyone claiming otherwise is not legitimate

- Do not click on any links or attachments in any email unless you have verified the sender. You may be directed to a scam website designed to steal your personal information or you might install malicious software onto your computer without ever knowing it. Utility companies typically send bills via mail, unless you have opted to receive your bill electronically.

Customers who suspect that they have been victims of fraud, or who feel threatened during contact, should alert local law enforcement authorities immediately. The [Federal Trade Commission](#) is also a good source of information about how to protect personal information. The Colorado Attorney General's [Office Consumer Protection Section](#) also provides consumer protection information for victims of fraud.

The Utilities United Against Scams ("UUAS") released an alert focused on scams in the time of the COVID-19 crisis. <https://www.utilitiesunited.org/-/media/Files/UNITED/Documents/UUAS-overview-Covid-19v2.ashx>

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About PUC

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) serves the public interest by effectively regulating utilities and facilities so that the people of Colorado receive safe, reliable, and reasonably-priced services consistent with the economic, environmental and social values of our state.

About OCC

The Colorado Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC), a division within the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA), represents residential, small business, and agricultural utility consumers as a class in electric and natural gas proceedings before the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC). The OCC does not regulate; it advises and advocates on behalf of consumers. The OCC helps consumers by lowering or eliminating proposed utility rate increases and by ensuring that utility rates, regulations and policies are more equitable for residential, small business, and agricultural consumers.

About DORA

DORA is dedicated to preserving the integrity of the marketplace and is committed to promoting a fair and competitive business environment in Colorado. Consumer protection is our mission. Visit dora.colorado.gov for more information or call 303-894-7855/toll free 1-800-886-7675 outside of Denver.

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