



BEWARE OF SCAMMERS THREATENING TO CUT OFF YOUR POWER

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Attorney General Roy Cooper, Duke Energy warn of telephone fraud targeting NC

Raleigh: A telephone payment scam targeting Duke Energy customers and customers of other utilities could heat up as the weather cools, Attorney General Roy Cooper said Monday.

"Scammers continue to make calls threatening consumers and small businesses to pay up or lose power, and we're concerned that the cold weather will give their threats extra force," Cooper said. "We want to put consumers and small business owners on high alert to watch out for these calls."

Cooper joined Duke Energy Senior Vice President of Customer Services Gayle Lanier and the owner of a local business that fell victim to the scam to warn North Carolinians today.

"It's especially important that we all remain diligent against fraudulent activity as we welcome another busy holiday season," Lanier said. "Duke Energy remains committed to working with our law enforcement and industry partners to combat this crime and to keep our customers informed."

The scam starts with a phone call from someone who claims to be a representative of Duke Energy or another utility company and threatens to disconnect power if the consumer doesn't pay immediately. The scammers often manipulate Caller ID to make it look like the call comes from the real utility.

Consumers who've gotten the calls report that they are told to make the payment via a reloadable debit card such as a Green Dot MoneyPak card. Victims purchase the card, load it with funds and then call the phony utility employee back to provide the card number needed to access the money.

A total of 42 consumers and small business owners have reported these calls to the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division this year, up from five reports in 2013. Duke Energy continues to receive dozens of calls each week about the scam.

So far in 2014, Cooper's office has heard from four consumers and six small businesses that fell for the scam, losing a combined total of around \$7,500. Recent reports include a Durham restaurant that lost \$700, a Raleigh shop that lost \$500, a Clayton deli and grocery that lost \$813, a Charlotte spa that lost \$495, and a restaurant in Oriental that lost more than \$2,500. Individual consumers in Greenville, Winston-Salem and Henderson County also reported paying money to the scammers. It's likely that there are additional North Carolina victims who have not yet come forward.

To protect yourself, remember:

- Duke Energy never asks customers with delinquent accounts to pay by prepaid debit card to avoid having

their service disconnected. Customers can make payments online, by phone, by automatic bank draft, by mail or in person.

- If you get one of these calls, hang up and report it to the Attorney General's Office at 1-877-5-NO-SCAM or online at www.ncdoj.gov.
- If you're concerned there may really be a problem with your power, contact Duke Energy or your electricity provider at a number you know to be valid, such as the one listed on your monthly bill.
- Duke Energy customers can also report the calls to Duke Energy Progress at 1-800-452-2777 or Duke Energy Carolinas at 1-800-777-9898. Duke Energy customers can also visit duke-energy.com for additional fraud awareness information.

Fraudulent calls like these can be very difficult to stop since technology makes it possible for criminals to make the calls from anywhere in the world. Telemarketing fraud rings frequently use Voice Over Internet Protocol (V.O.I.P) to make their calls harder to trace, and they use technology to make it appear that their calls come from another telephone number, called "spoofing." Cooper's office works with other states as well as local, federal and international law enforcement to try to locate and stop telemarketing fraud rings.

Cooper today also joined with 37 other state Attorneys General to ask the Federal Trade Commission to modernize and strengthen rules that govern telemarketing. The [reforms requested](#) would help curb abusive telemarketing practices and give law enforcement more tools to go after telephone fraud.

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