



UTILITIES UNITED AGAINST SCAMS

PRESS RELEASE
November 16, 2020

El Paso Utilities Unite to Educate and Empower Customers to Avoid Scams

El Paso, Texas – El Paso Electric (EPE), El Paso Water and Texas Gas Service team up to raise awareness and educate customers on scams through the fourth annual Utility Scam Awareness Week initiative. Initiated by the Utilities United Against Scams, or UUAS, the week-long advocacy and awareness campaign focuses on educating customers of the tactics scammers use to steal their money.

“Working alongside El Paso Electric and El Paso Water allows us to raise awareness about scams. We want to make sure all of our customers receive the value in services they expect without falling victim to fraud,” said Texas Gas Service Director of Customer Service Callie Sneddon.

The frequency and volume of scams over the last year has increased, particularly those disguised as assistance to those impacted by the pandemic, targeting both residential and commercial customers. As scammers target customers of all three utilities that serve El Paso, the tactics used on customers have similarities.

“Any scam can be extremely harmful financially to customers, and we find that each year utility scams become more sophisticated, increasingly common and persistent in their tactics,” states Eddie Gutierrez, EPE Vice President of Strategic Communications, Customer and Community Engagement. “Part of our core mission in providing safe and reliable sources of power includes empowering customers with the tools necessary to quickly spot and report possible scams.”

Scammers typically utilize phone, online, text and in-person forms of communication to target utility customers. Scammers can pose as electric, water or natural gas company employees, or third-party representatives for a utility, and usually threaten customers with service disconnection if they do not immediately make payment via a prepared debit card or other non-traceable forms of payment.

“EPWater employees are always in uniform and in utility-marked vehicles when they visit your home. We will never demand entrance and we will not ask for your social security number,” said El Paso Water Vice President of Strategic, Financial and Management Services Marcela Navarrete.

Signs of Potential Scam Activity:

- **Threat to disconnect:** Scammers may aggressively tell the customer his or her utility bill is past due and service will be disconnected if a payment is not made – usually within less than an hour.

- **Request for immediate payment:** Scammers may instruct the customer to purchase a prepaid card – widely available at retail stores – then call them back supposedly to make a bill payment to his or her utility company.
- **Request for prepaid card:** When the customer calls back, the caller asks the customer for the prepaid card’s number, which grants the scammer instant access to the card’s funds, and the victim’s money is gone.

How Customers Can Protect Themselves:

- Customers should never purchase a prepaid card to avoid service disconnection or shutoff. Utilities do not specify how customers should make a bill payment and they offer a variety of ways to pay a bill.
- If someone threatens immediate disconnection or shutoff of service, customers should hang up the phone, delete the email, or shut the door, and call their utility’s Customer Service Department to inquire about their account.
- If customers suspect someone is trying to scam them, they should hang up, delete the email, or shut the door. They should then call their utility company at the number on their monthly bill or the company’s website, not the phone number the scammer provides. If customers ever feel that they are in physical danger, they should call 911.

Important customer service contact numbers:

El Paso Electric	El Paso Water	Texas Gas Service
Texas (915) 543-5970	(915) 594-5500	800-700-2443
New Mexico (575) 526-5555	http://www.epwater.org/	https://www.texasgasservice.com/
https://www.epelectric.com/		

Customers who suspect that they have been victims of fraud, or who feel threatened during contact with one of these scammers, should contact local law enforcement authorities. The Federal Trade Commission’s website is also a good source of information about how to protect personal information.

About Utilities United Against Scams

Utilities United Against Scams is a consortium of over 100 U.S. and Canadian electric, water and natural gas utilities, working together to educate consumer about utility-related scams. Visit www.utilitiesunited.org for more information and tips about how to protect yourself from scams or follow along on social media: **Twitter** @U_U_A_S and **Facebook** @UtilitiesUnited.

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Media Contacts:

Javier C. Camacho	Denise Parra	Christy Penders
Public Relations Specialist	Lead Public Affairs Coordinator	Communications Manager
El Paso Electric Company	El Paso Water	Texas Gas Service
T: 915.543.4031	T: 915.594.5510	T: 512.370.8322
C: 915.487.4753		C: 512.791.3450