

For Immediate Release
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**MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
WARNS CONSUMERS OF POSSIBLE TELEPHONE FRAUD**

St. Paul, Minnesota - The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission advises consumers to be on their guard against deceptive telephone calls placed under the guise of being on behalf of a utility seeking immediate payment for an “overdue” bill. This scam is being perpetrated across the country and, if the trend continues, may soon be occurring here in Minnesota.

In this criminal activity, an individual will call a customer of a utility company and represent that they are calling from the company. The customer’s first check on the validity of this call by means of caller-ID is ineffective. The scammer’s caller-ID is falsified so it appears that the call originates from the utility company, a practice known as “spoofing”. This utility “representative” threatens that the electric or gas service to the home or business of the customer will be disconnected unless they make an immediate payment.

To avoid a disconnection, the customer is told they must pay this “overdue utility bill” by means of an on-line payment service or a prepaid credit card. Of course, the funds are, in fact, directed to the scam artist’s operation.

Minnesota Public Utilities Commissioner Betsy Wergin is currently the Chair of the Committee on Consumer Affairs for the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. In that capacity, this week she sent a letter to the Chair of the State Commission in each State in the nation similarly detailing this troubling activity.

Commissioner Wergin states, “Anything we can do make ratepayers aware that this scam is crossing the country in order to prevent it from affecting Minnesota, can only benefit the people we are charged to protect.”

If a constituent is suspicious of any call threatening disconnection and demanding immediate payment, they can hang up and directly call their utility’s customer service representative. That way they can know for certain with whom they are speaking. In addition, the constituent can report their concerns to their utility.

A customer can contact the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission regarding this type of activity. The Commission’s Consumer Affairs Office can be reach in the metropolitan area at 651-296-0406, toll free at 1-800-657-3782, or by e-mail at consumer.puc@state.mn.us.