

## Avoid Utility Scams at Home BBB Column- July 2021

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As the summer heat continues in South Texas, so do the number of scammers impersonating water, electric, and gas company representatives. They frequently threaten residents with deactivation of service or misrepresent utility companies to secure business. This scam is most common in the spring/summer months.

### How the Scam Works:

Utility company imposters will typically reach you with a telephone call or knock on your door claiming to be a representative from SAWS, CPS Energy or a utility contractor. In the most common scenario, the scammer informs you that payment is overdue, and the utility will be shut off if you don't pay up immediately. But in other cases, registered solar companies solicit customers door-to-door to promote solar rebates through CPS Energy – which can lead to confusion with a potential scammer.

Scammers use a variety of other tricks to prey on utility customers. A "representative" may appear at your door in a plausible work uniform claiming your electric meter is not working properly and must be immediately replaced. In a particularly alarming form of this con, the scammer may gain access to your home to perform "repairs" or an "energy audit" with the intent of stealing your valuables. These cons may also involve promises of energy discounts with the aim of taking your money or personal information.

CPS Energy will never: Call to demand payment by cash, credit card or gift cards at your home or business, Request credit card or banking information over the telephone or ask to enter your home unless you have initiated a request for a specific service.

### Tips to Spot This Scam:

- **Prepaid debit cards and wire transfers are a red flag.** If a caller specifically asks you to pay by prepaid debit card, gift card, cash app or wire transfer, this is a huge warning sign. Your utility company will accept a check or credit card. Both offer additional protection for disputing a charge.
- **Pressure to pay immediately.** Scammers will press for immediate payment and may try to intimidate you into giving them your personal and banking information. Don't confirm your identity or account details.

### Protect Yourself Against This Scam:

- **Call customer service.** Con artists can manipulate caller ID to appear as if a utility company is calling. If you feel pressured for immediate action by a caller, hang up and call the customer service number on your utility bill. This will ensure you are speaking to a real representative.
- **Never allow anyone into your home unless you have scheduled an appointment or reported a problem.** Further, ask utility employees for proper identification before letting them enter.