Small Businesses: Watch for Fake Utility Account Calls

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MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has recently heard from a number of Wisconsin businesses who received threatening phone calls about their utility accounts.

Scammers falsely claiming to represent the local utility company are calling businesses or consumers and threatening them with disconnection of services unless immediate payment is made. If you receive a similar threatening call about your home or business utility account, hang up and do not engage the caller. Contact your local utility provider to inquire about the status of your account and to report the call.

Most of the recent calls to DATCP about this scam have come from businesses in eastern Wisconsin. Because this is a phone-based scam, however, no region in the state is immune to these potential calls.

Avoid being tricked in a utility scam by remembering these simple guidelines:

- Utility companies will contact you by mail if your account is overdue. They may also call you if your services are at risk of being terminated, but will NEVER demand immediate payment over the phone.
- If a caller demands a utility payment by prepaid debit card or wire transfer, it is a scam.
- Scammers can manipulate your caller ID display to show the local utility company's name or number when they call.
- If you are unsure of the status of your account, contact your service provider using the number listed on your recent gas or electric bill or visit their website to identify a customer service phone number.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at http://datcp.wisconsin.gov, send an e-mail to datcphotline@wisconsin.gov, or call the Consumer Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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