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# Utilities raise awareness about scams

RECENTLY, MORE THAN 80 utilities and energy industry organizations from across the U.S. and Canada, including



more than 40 electric co-ops, joined forces to recognize the first-ever North American Utilities United Against Scams Day on Nov. 16, 2016.

Electric co-ops have increased their communication efforts, sending information directly to members and encouraging local TV stations and newspapers to warn citizens about scams.

Scammers are developing new tactics every day to dupe even the wariest member.

The “past due” scam goes something like this: A member gets a call from an 800-number that looks like a valid utility company phone number. Widely available spoofing software allows crooks to display what appears to be an official number on caller IDs. The caller threatens to cut off power if the member doesn’t pay.

But here’s the giveaway: The crook will demand payment via a prepaid debit card or money order. And he’ll ask for it within a few hours or less. The scammer may even quote an amount that sounds like your typical monthly bill.

Scammers might direct the member to a specific store nearby that sells the prepaid cards and instruct them to put money on the card and provide the card number to the scammer.

Some scammers have even been bold enough to contact potential victims in person, at the member’s house. Santee Electric will never send someone to your home to collect money.

Santee Electric may call members from time to time to advise of impending inclement weather or scheduled maintenance that may

cause power outages. However, late-payment notices are sent to individual members by mail. Santee Electric will never require members to purchase prepaid debit cards to avoid immediate disconnection.

## Protect yourself

- ▶ Do not assume the name and number on your caller ID are legitimate.
- ▶ Never share your date of birth, Social Security number or banking account information with anyone calling to collect money over the phone.
- ▶ Never wire money to someone you don’t know.
- ▶ If you receive a call that sounds like it may be a scam, or if you believe the call is a scam, hang up, call the police and report the incident to your local utility.
- ▶ Never search the internet for a place to pay your bill. Only pay your bill at [www.santee.org](http://www.santee.org) or on your SmartHub app.
- ▶ Check your account status anytime at [www.santee.org](http://www.santee.org) or on your SmartHub app.

## How you can help

You can alert your family members and friends. Share the scammers’ tactics described in this article or those you have heard about. You can also help raise awareness and warn others by reposting scam awareness information on social media; use the hashtag #stopscams.

**Robert G. Ardis III**  
*President and Chief Executive Officer*