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**'Tis the Season for Scams:
The ICC Reminds Utility Customers to Beware of Scam Artists Posing as Utility
Company Representatives, Demanding Immediate Payment**

SPRINGFIELD, IL--The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) reminds utility customers to be wary of increased scams this season targeting utility customers across Illinois. The ICC has received numerous complaints from consumers contacted by scammers claiming to be a utility employee. Most often they threaten to disconnect service if they don't receive immediate payment.

The scam artists approach customers or collect money in a variety of ways including telephone, mail, email, door-to-door or in person. They often direct the consumer to purchase a prepaid credit card, a "Cash Card," and to call them back with the corresponding Personal Identification Number (PIN). The scammers also provide different stories to explain why a payment is past due, such as: a customer's billing cycle recently changed and a "catch up payment" must be received to avoid disconnection; or the customer's previous payment was rejected or never received.

Both business and residential customers have been targeted throughout the state, and Ameren Illinois recently saw an increase in complaints.

"We have received numerous reports from small business customers in Illinois over the past month," said Shirley Stennis, Director of Customer Service for Ameren Illinois. "The majority of those incidents were phone calls from scammers who threaten immediate disconnection of utility service unless a payment was made from a pre-paid debit card. Ameren Illinois would never demand a payment or threaten disconnection in this manner. If you are an Ameren customer and receive a call like this, please end the call and immediately call Ameren at 1-800-755-5000."

Scam artists are using more sophisticated methods to outsmart consumers, including a tactic called "spoofing." This manipulates the Caller ID displayed phone number so that it appears to be coming from the utility. Some scammers even record the voice mail phone prompt from the utility, then use it

as their own voice prompt. When suspicious customers call the number displayed on their caller ID, they hear the exact same voice prompt the utility uses.

ICC Chairman Brien Sheahan urges consumers to heed the warning signs and protect themselves by contacting their utility or the ICC.

“A legitimate utility company already has your pertinent information. They also have your payment history and can provide proof of any past due amounts,” Sheahan said. “Utility companies in Illinois are also required to provide ample time to make past due payments before disconnecting service. If you were not previously made aware of this past due amount, you should first contact your utility provider to verify the information.”

The ICC offers these reminders to utility customers:

- Never provide personal information to anyone claiming to be a representative of the utility, such as bank account numbers, ATM PINs, debit or credit card information or Social Security numbers.
- Be on guard for anyone who says you must pay immediately or suggests a quick method of payment that is difficult to trace.
- Utility field personnel in Illinois do not take payments from consumers. If you are visited by someone claiming to be from a utility, do not provide payment and do not let them in your home. Only make in-person payments at previously determined utility field offices.
- Contact the utility at the phone number listed on your bill to confirm that the caller, or the representative at your home, is a verifiable employee of the utility. Do not call a different number suggested by the potential scammer.
- Never open a utility email attachment unless you have recently contacted your utility specifically asking them to email you detailed information that may be in that attachment.

If you suspect you have been scammed, have a suspicious incident to report or have questions, contact the ICC’s Consumer Services Division at 1-800-524-0795. You may also contact Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan’s Consumer Fraud Hotline at 1-800-386-5438 or file a complaint on her website at <http://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/about/contacts.html>

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About the Illinois Commerce Commission

The Illinois Commerce Commission's mission is to pursue an appropriate balance between the interests of consumers and existing and emerging service providers to ensure the provision of adequate, efficient, reliable, safe and least-cost public utility services. The Commission consists of three bureaus: the Bureau of External Affairs, which provides educational information on utility issues for consumers, governmental entities and communities and through its Consumer Services Division, resolves customer/utility disputes and develops rules on utility service and consumer protection; the Public Utilities Bureau, which focuses on financial and operational analysis, policy development, public safety and enforcement activities related to electric, natural gas, water, sewer and telecommunications companies; and the Transportation Bureau, which includes trucking insurance and registration, railroad safety, relocation towing, safety towing and household goods moving company enforcement activities. The ICC's five commissioners are appointed by the Governor and approved by the Illinois State Senate for five-year terms.

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