

# COLUMBUS CURRENTS

## Energy Scams Unmasked

By Anne Prince

Consumers with water, gas and electricity connections have long been targets for utility scams. But in today's digital world, every swipe and click increases the risk of potential scams.

Scammers are more sophisticated than ever before, and they understand our increasing reliance on technology. With their sharpened digital knives, scammers have adapted their tactics to trick unsuspecting consumers through a variety of methods.

Columbus Electric Cooperative wants to help you avoid energy scams, whether a financial loss or leak of your personal information. This month, I'd like to share updates on some of the latest utility scams, as well as tips to help you stay safe from even the craftiest scammers.

### Recent Utility Scams

Scammers typically disguise themselves—either physically or digitally—as utility employees or representatives to steal consumers' money or personal information. A common trick is to claim a consumer's bill is past due and threaten to disconnect service if payment isn't received immediately. Scammers approach consumers through a variety of means, including phone calls, text messages, emails and even in-person visits. However, the digital line of attack is increasingly more common.

For example, new capabilities disguising caller ID or "spoofing" can make the phone number you see on caller ID appear to be from a trusted source. Spoofing makes it easier for scammers to deceive you because it's more difficult to immediately verify the call. Another recent scam uses fraudulent websites that are identical to a utility payment webpage—and what's worse, these pages are often promoted on search engines to trick consumers into clicking and making a payment.

Another recent scam involves phone calls, text messages or emails claiming you overpaid your electric bill and will receive a cash or banking refund. This offer may seem too good to be true, and it is—it's likely a scam aimed to steal your personal information.

### Spotting a Scam

There are several red flags you can watch for to identify an energy scam.

Scammers often use high-pressure tactics to create a sense of urgency, like claiming your electricity or other services will be disconnected if a payment isn't made immediately.

Additionally, scammers may ask for unusual payment methods such as gift cards or cryptocurrency. If someone is pushing for an unusual payment method, it's likely a scam.

You've probably noticed that many digital scams, like emails or text messages, include poor grammar, spelling errors and odd email addresses. These are red flags, so when you see these dodgy forms of communication, consider it a potential scam.

### What Columbus Electric Cooperative Will (and Won't) Do

Columbus Electric Cooperative will never demand an instant, immediate payment and threaten to disconnect your service without prior notices or warnings. We strive to resolve challenging situations and work with our members to avoid disconnects.

Columbus Electric Cooperative will never ask for your Social Security number or banking details over the phone or through email. We offer several secure payment options, including in-person at our Deming office, [columbusco-op.org](http://columbusco-op.org), scheduled automatic payments, SmartHub or by calling 1-800-950-2667 to speak with a member service representative.

### Avoiding Scams

Whether in-person, over the phone or online, always be suspicious of an unknown individual claiming to be a Columbus Electric employee requesting banking or other personal information.

If you're ever in doubt about a potential energy scam, just give us a quick call at 1-800-950-2667 so we can assist. Columbus Electric Cooperative wants to help protect you and our community against utility frauds, and by notifying us about potential scams, you can create the first line of defense. We encourage you to report any potential scams so we can spread the word and prevent others in our community from falling victim.

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# TIPS TO BEAT THE SUMMER PEAK

When we all work together to lower energy use during peak hours, we can lock in lower electricity rates, so everyone saves. Here are a few simple ways to save during peak summer hours.

- 1** Raise the thermostat a few degrees.
- 2** Use ceiling fans (in occupied rooms) to feel cooler.
- 3** Avoid using major appliances.
- 4** Close drapes and blinds to block heat from the sun.
- 5** Turn off and unplug non-essential electronics and lights.



## Board Highlights

The Board of Trustees met on July 30, 2024. They listened to a presentation from Aaron Greiner of Transmission & Distribution Services related to a mini-SCADA system. They reviewed and approved the operations and financial reports for the month of June.



## Notice: Energy Assistance and Moratorium Protection (LIHEAP)

Protection from winter shut-off begins November 15, 2024. To avoid potential disconnection of services please contact the New Mexico Human Services Department at 800-283-4465, or the appropriate tribal or pueblo entity for eligibility information for low-income heating energy assistance program (LIHEAP). Your service will not be disconnected from November 15, 2024, through March 15, 2025, if you meet the qualifications of LIHEAP and have no past due amounts or you remain current on any settlement or installment agreement for amounts due as of November 15, 2024. Members of New Mexico tribes or pueblos who need help with translation or with other matters may contact the commission's consumer relations division at (888) 427-5772, who will contact the appropriate tribal or pueblo official for assistance.

Para información en español llame 1-800-950-2667.

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Placing heat sources, such as lamps, computers or TVs, near your thermostat can result in false temperature readings, increased energy use and inconsistent cooling/heating. Make sure your thermostat is installed in an area clear of obstructions, electronic devices, direct sunlight and drafts.

Ensuring your thermostat is free from these types of interferences optimizes energy efficiency, improves indoor comfort and reduces wear and tear on your cooling/heating system.

Source: [energy.gov](http://energy.gov)



Emergency Response Number  
1-800-228-0579

Toll - free Office Number  
1-800-950-COOP (2667)