



Sept. 30, 2014

Minnesota utilities unite to fight scams *“Slam the Scam” launched to raise customer awareness*

Minnesota Power - Amy Rutledge, 218-723-7400
Lake Country Power - Tami Zaun, 218-326-7152
Superior Water Light and Power – Bill Fennessey, 715-395-6249
CenterPoint Energy - Becca Virden, 612-321-4879
Connexus Energy - Samantha Neral, 763-323-2636
Cooperative Light & Power - Sarah Cron, 218-834-2226
Dakota Electric - Joe Miller, 651-463-6178
East Central Energy - Jennifer Veaser, 763-689-8019
Great River Energy - Therese LaCanne, 763-445-5710
Minnesota Energy Resources Corporation - Jeff Larson, 651-322-8907
Minnesota Rural Electric Association - Joel Johnson, 763-424-7237
Otter Tail Power Company - Cris Oehler, 218-739-8297
Wright-Hennepin Cooperative Electric - Andrea Unger, 763-477-3113
Xcel Energy - Patti Nystuen, 612-215-5300

Duluth— For the first time, 13 Minnesota utilities and one Wisconsin utility are joining forces to fight back against scams. Reports of phone and email billing scams targeting Minnesota utility customers are increasing at an alarming rate, representing thousands of dollars lost by customer victims. In an effort to shut down scammers, the Minnesota utility coalition today launched “Slam the Scam,” an awareness campaign aimed at warning customers and preventing scams. The coalition is encouraging customers who think they are being targeted by a scammer to simply end the conversation – “slam” down the phone.

Utility companies across the country are reporting an increase in scams aimed at customers. Some Minnesota utilities are experiencing an increase of more than 300 percent in customer scam attempts compared to 2013 figures. Scammers are targeting all classes of customers, but particularly small businesses such as restaurants. In most cases, a scammer calls during busy hours of operation and threatens to disconnect the customer’s utility service unless the customer makes a payment immediately.

Scammers are using various tactics to con customers into providing payment. Posing as utility employees, scammers have been known to:

- Tell intended victims their accounts are past due and threaten to disconnect their utility service if they do not make payments immediately.
- Require victims to pay using a pre-paid debit card, such as a Green Dot card.
- Manipulate caller ID to display a fake number, which may actually be your utility's number. This is called "spoofing."
- Email customers phony utility bills that appear to be from an energy provider with an account number, amount due, due date and a link to make the payment.

Protecting personal and financial customer data is a top priority for utilities, and they are working to provide solutions to protect the public from scams. Utilities want customers to know how to identify a scam. If they are behind on their bills, they will receive a written notice before service disconnection. Customers who have not received a disconnection notice in the mail should not engage anyone on the phone or by email demanding to take payment. Instead, customers should hang up and contact their respective utilities to verify account status and report the attempted scam. They are also encouraged to report the incident to local law enforcement. Utilities offer the following tips to avoid being victimized:

- Never give out personal information or credit card numbers or wire money as a result of an unexpected or unsolicited call or email if you cannot validate the authenticity.
- Be suspicious if the caller is insisting on the use of a pre-paid debit card or an immediate payment. Utilities provide many options for payment.
- Know that your utility will contact customers first by U.S. mail about past due bills. You will be sent a disconnection notice in writing before your service is turned off
- If it just doesn't feel right, "slam the scam" and end the conversation.
- Your utility will welcome the call to verify your account status. Contact your utility using a number provided on a recent bill or the company's website.

The [Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota](#) is closely tracking these types of scams and has provided an [informative video](#) to help protect the public.

###