



PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

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UTILITY SCAM

A utility scam claiming that President Obama is providing funds to help consumers pay their utility bills is sweeping the nation. Imposters contact power company customers through telephone calls, mail, fliers, email, text messages, social media, and in person. After the victim is contacted, the imposter convinces them to relay personal information by claiming that the victim is eligible to receive cash benefits from a government program. After the victim provides their social security number, credit card number, and bank information, the victim is given a bank account and routing number to use when paying utility bills. The victim is told the account is set-up through a federal assistance program that will provide up to \$1,000 toward the victim's utility bills.^{1,2}

The bank account and routing numbers provided by the con-artist are not real. Victims of this scam assume their utility bills are being paid by the fictitious government bank account. While there is no direct or immediate financial loss to the victim, the victims are now susceptible to identity theft because they provided their personal information to the imposter. Additionally, their utility payment is now overdue and they could be assessed late fees or penalties for non-payment.³

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the Better Business Bureau, thousands of people throughout the nation, including Pennsylvania, have become victims of this scam with the majority being elderly.⁴ Many utility companies are publishing information regarding the fraudulent program on their websites in an attempt to educate their consumers. This information should be shared with family and friends to help prevent them from becoming victims.

- Do not give personal or sensitive information, such as social security numbers, credit card numbers, or banking information, to anyone unless you initiated the contact and you are confident of their legitimacy.
- Do not allow anyone into your home unless they have official identification. Examine the identification card closely and contact the company he/she claims to represent if you think the circumstances are suspicious.
- Do not open your door to anyone from the utility company unless you have a scheduled appointment or have reported a problem. Utility companies only send their employees out for appointments or problems; they will not just show up.

If you think you have been a victim of this scam:

- Contact your bank immediately.
- Contact the three national credit bureaus; Equifax at (800) 685-1111, Experian at (888) 397-3742, and TransUnion at (800) 888-4213; and put a fraud alert on your account.
- Contact the Federal Trade Commission and register an identity theft complaint at (877) 438-4338 or <https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov/>.

¹ Muschick, P. (2012, July 7). Obama isn't paying your electric bill. *The Morning Call*. Retrieved 08/06/2012 from http://articles.mcall.com/2012-07-07/news/mc-obama-bill-pay-scam-watchdog-20120707_1_electric-bill-outstanding-bills-ppl-bills.

² Beware of scam calls during President Obama's visit to Texas. (2012, July 16). *Better Business Bureau*. Retrieved 08/06/2012 from <http://www.bbb.org/us/article/beware-of-scam-calls-during-president-obamas-visit-to-texas-35576>.

³ Beware of scam calls during President Obama's visit to Texas. (2012, July 16). *Better Business Bureau*. Retrieved 08/06/2012 from <http://www.bbb.org/us/article/beware-of-scam-calls-during-president-obamas-visit-to-texas-35576>.

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