

Utilities Are Raising Awareness About Scams

by Traci Warren, National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association

When a scammer called Florida pet clinic operator Cindy Evers last year and demanded immediate payment on an overdue electric bill, it sounded real.

"They knew my account number and gave me a figure that I owed that's close to what I usually pay on my electric bill," Evers said. She paid, even though, in the back of her mind, she knew her payment wasn't late.

"I have pets under sedation, and I'm taking care of animals. I think I just panicked, thinking they were going to shut my electricity off. I did what they told me to do."

Evers lost \$900 because the call was a scam.

The scam that duped Evers has been plaguing utility consumers across North America for several years, robbing them of millions.

Now, utilities are fighting back.

Recently, more than 80 utilities and energy industry organizations from across the U.S. and Canada joined forces to recognize the first-ever North American Utilities United Against Scams Day.

Electric co-ops have increased their communication efforts, sending information directly to members and encouraging local TV stations and newspapers to warn citizens about the scam, how it works and what people should do and not do, if they are ever targeted.

UTILITIES UNITED AGAINST SCAMS

Suspect a scammer?

Here's what to do if the call seems suspicious:



1. Hang up.
2. Call SWRE at 1-800-256-7973.
3. Verify the status of your SWRE account and that no one from SWRE has called you.
4. Report the scam call to the police.

DON'T FALL FOR THE CALL!

Even the wariest consumers can be duped, however. The scammers are developing new tactics every day.

The "past due" scam, similar to the one Florida customer Evers experienced, goes something like this: A customer gets a call from an 800-number that looks like a valid utility company phone number. Widely available spoofing software al-

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SWRE will no longer make "Bill Due" calls

In the past, SWRE personnel have at times made "Bill Due" calls to notify co-op members that their service is about to be disconnected.

Effective immediately, the co-op will no longer make such calls.

It is the responsibility of each account holder to ensure that his or her payment has been made and received by SWRE on or before the due date.

Members may mail their payment to the co-op or pay their bill in person at the Tipton office.

Payments may also be made at SWRE's website (www.swre.com) or via the SWRE app for phones

and tablets.

SWRE payments may be made at participating banks, but members should be aware that it sometimes takes up to 10 days for bank payments to be received at SWRE and credited to accounts. Bank payments that are not received by SWRE prior to the due date will result in service cut-offs.

Payments will not be accepted by linemen or other SWRE personnel away from the office.

The co-op will accept credit or debit card payments by phone, but SWRE will not initiate those calls asking for payment.

SWRE Manager's Report



Manager enjoys being in Texoma

Nobody ever said that moving is easy.

And... my wife Kim and I will testify to that fact!

The process of finding a house, arranging movers, and getting everything transported from five states away is not for the faint of heart. It takes determination, and it takes some time!

I am pleased to report, though, that our physical move from Georgia is almost complete and both Kim and I are more excited every day about living in Texoma and being part of Southwest Rural Electric Cooperative.

I'm happy to tell you that I'm not just an employee of the co-op now, but I'm also an SWRE member.

That's because our new home is located on SWRE lines and the cooperative is our electricity provider.

Just like every new member, we launched our electric service by joining. The basic \$5 membership fee that we paid to become members is the same fee that has been charged since the co-op began in 1937, and I feel honored to be part of that membership tradition.

I'm sure that for a few weeks both Kim and I will be arranging furniture, organizing closets, and looking for random items that have been "lost in the move."

Everyone who has ever moved from one house to another knows exactly what I mean.

We are both looking forward to really getting to know southwest Oklahoma and north Texas. Part of the fun of living in a new place is the adventure of exploring new stores, eating in new places, checking out unique attractions, and enjoying the scenery.

Here, that "scenery" means taking in the amazing sunrises and feeling awed at views of the open horizon. We appreciate the beauty of this place.

The years we lived in Georgia were spent boxed in by trees. The open expanse of Texoma reminds both Kim and me of the area in Louisiana where we both grew up. We love it, and we already feel very much at home here.

I have been on the job at SWRE since mid-December. I stayed in a hotel while we searched for a home and later as Kim returned to Georgia to make arrangements for the move.

During my time here, I've discovered several notable things about Texoma and SWRE.

1. **The people here are friendly!** We've already met many wonderful people, and folks are genuinely interested in our story. When they learn that we are

coming from Georgia, they offer advice about what to see and do here. They've invited us to church, offered friendly suggestions about where to live, and almost always greeted us with a smile and an easy manner. And... when they learn that we are here to work for SWRE, they almost always have something good to tell us about the co-op! We find that SWRE has a good reputation across Texoma!

2. **SWRE is a progressive, member-centered co-op.** Programs such as the co-op's community solar fields, geothermal services, and generator sales are in place to benefit the members. What's more, SWRE has embraced technology. That's not an easy thing for a co-op of our size, but it is essential for providing good service and remaining viable as we move into the future. "*Safety, Service, Satisfaction... One Member at a Time!*" is a motto that has real meaning for SWRE.

3. **SWRE has wonderful employees.** As I've learned more about the co-op's services and programs, I've been amazed at the depth of character and abilities of the people who work every day to coordinate and implement those programs. From the linemen, to the managers, to the office personnel, the co-op's workers are excellent. As I interact with them and get to know them, I have been impressed and I have concluded what you probably already know – SWRE is fortunate indeed to have these people working for us!

In future months I will be using this column to keep you informed on my perspective about things of importance to our organization, and I'm sure that I'll probably continue to offer some information and insights about myself and my family. I hope to also turn the focus, one at a time, on many of our excellent SWRE employees, letting you the members know how they contribute to our co-op service and something about the depth of character that they represent.

Thanks for the words of encouragement and greeting that many of you have provided as I've joined the SWRE staff.

I look forward to meeting more of you. If you see me in your community and recognize me from my photo in this publication, don't hesitate to introduce yourself.

I'm happy to be part of SWRE and look forward to what the future will bring for our organization.

Kenneth E. Simmons

Be alert to phone scams

Continued from Page 1

lows crooks to display what appears to be an official number on caller IDs. The caller threatens to cut off power if the customer 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 specified time frame – often an hour or less.

The scammer may even quote an amount that sounds like your typical monthly bill. That way, the threat has even more credibility.

Scammers might direct the customer to a specific store nearby that sells the prepaid cards and instruct the customer 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, coming to the member's house.

Here are some tips on how to protect yourself:

- **Do not assume that the name and number on your caller ID are legitimate.**

mate. Caller IDs can be spoofed.

- **NEVER share your personal information, including date of birth, Social Security number or banking account information.**
- **NEVER wire money to someone you don't know.**
- **Do not click links or call numbers in unexpected emails or texts – especially those asking for your account information.**
- **Most utilities will NOT require their customers to purchase prepaid debit cards or money orders to avoid an immediate disconnection.**
- **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.**

Tracy Warren writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Virginia-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

What's Cookin' in the SWRE Kitchen

Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 egg
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Grease cookie sheets or line with parchment paper.
2. Sift together the flour, baking soda and salt; set aside.
3. In a medium bowl, cream together the melted butter, brown sugar, and white sugar until well blended. Beat in the vanilla, egg, and egg yolk until light and creamy. Mix in the sifted



- ingredients until just blended. Stir in the chocolate chips by hand using a wooden spoon. Drop cookie dough 1/4 cup at a time onto the prepared cookie sheets. Cookies should be about 3 inches apart.
4. Bake 15-17 minutes in the preheated oven, or until the edges are slightly toasted. Cool on baking sheets for a few minutes before transferring to wire racks to cool completely.

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Payments can be made at SWRE, 700 North Broadway, Tipton, OK 73570.

Online payments can be made at www.swre.com or utilizing the SWRE app for phones and tablets.

Payments may also be made at the following area banking institutions:

Oklahoma

Altus – Frazier Bank, National Bank of Commerce
Blair – Peoples State Bank
Snyder – All American Bank
Frederick – BancFirst, Frazier Bank

Texas

Chillicothe – American National Bank
Crowell – State Bank
Electra – Waggoner National Bank
Vernon – Herring Bank, Waggoner Bank, Bank of the West

NOTE: When paying at a bank, allow 7-10 days prior to the bill's due date.



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For Sale: Wooden miniature horse cart. Stored inside barn and never used. \$300. Call 580-639-2526 or e-mail admin@tommyfranks.com

For Sale: Large lift chair. Bought in November. Call 580-563-9141 for info.

For Sale: Glider rocker, \$20; Gazelle exercise machine, \$10; Simple sewing machine cabinet, \$10; Old treadle sewing machine cabinet w/o foot, \$15; Old evaporative cooler (may or may not work, but has new pump), free – you haul. Near Oklaunion, TX. Call 940-886-2312

For Sale: 2005 Dodge 2500 4x4 diesel. Automatic, 4-door quad cab, long bed. Ranch hand bumper, gooseneck hitch, bedliners, fender flares. 139,000 miles. \$19,500 OBO. Also, spike bed for 3/4-ton pickup w/ 2 toolboxes. \$2,500 OBO, or package deal. Call Larry at 580-335-1655

For Sale: Quonset hut steel metal building, 30'x40'. Never been assembled. Still on trailer. Have complete assembly blueprints for it. Call 580-919-1656

For Sale: Commercial building in Tipton on four corner lots with a 20'x48' warehouse. For more information, call 580-667-5466 or 580-305-0904

For Sale: Breed roping cows for sale, and eight head of fresh roping steers. Four or five have ear-length horns. Others are less. Photos available. Call 940-886-7711

Youth Tour essay contest open to area 11th grade students

Deadline for SWRE's 2017 Youth Tour Essay Contest is fast approaching.

The contest is open to all 11th grade students who live or attend school in SWRE's service territory.

Complete information, rules, and essay topic is available for download at the co-op's website, www.swre.com (located under "Community and Youth"), or by calling SWRE at 1-800-256-7973.

Essays for the contest must be turned in to SWRE on or before Friday, February 17, 2017.

Eight finalists will be selected to present their essays as speeches to a panel of judges. Two students will win trips this summer to Washington, D.C.

NOTE: To be included in the print issue of SWRE News, ads should be received by the 10th of the previous month.

FREE classified non-commercial ads available for SWRE members only
MAIL ADS TO JOE WYNN AT P.O. BOX 310 TIPTON, OK 73570. E-MAIL THEM TO JOEW@SWRE.COM, OR CALL 1-800-256-7973.