



## News from Livingston County, NY

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **New York State Division of Consumer Protection Warns about Callers Posing as Utility Employees**

**Mount Morris, NY, August 29, 2019**— The New York State Division of Consumer Protection is alerting consumers to a scam where people claiming to represent an electric, gas or water company – whether the consumer is a customer of theirs or not – ask for consumer information, including account numbers, social security numbers, and dates of birth, and request payment for alleged past-due bills.

The scammers also send emails seeking the same information and, in some instances, have visited targets' homes. The scam has now transitioned to communities where English is less prevalent, with callers speaking in the target's native language, including Spanish and Chinese.

"Unfortunately, utility scams periodically pop up throughout the year, but scammers are now targeting vulnerable and limited English-speaking communities that may not be aware of these nefarious tactics," said New York Secretary of State Rossana Rosado, who oversees the Division of Consumer Protection. "If you are called or approached by someone purporting to be from a utility company and seeking payment, take steps protect yourself."

The Division of Consumer Protection offers the following tips to prevent falling victim to these recent scams:

**Confirm the caller.** Consumers should not rely on the number that comes up on their phone. Callers can "spoof" the number to look like a local utility company. If someone has contacted an individual and they are suspicious, they should hang up and go directly to the official website for the utility company or call the number on their utility bill to confirm whether there is a problem with their account.

**Don't give the caller information.** Consumers should never give out or confirm sensitive information, including utility account numbers, credit card numbers, or Social Security numbers unless they are 100 percent sure they know who they are dealing with.

**Utility companies will not shut off utilities via the phone.** Real utility companies issue several disconnection warnings before shutting off utilities and they never demand money over the phone or specify a method of payment.

**Utility companies do not ask for payment via gift cards, Green Dot Money-Pak, bitcoin, or wire transfer.** Gift cards and bitcoin allow scammers to get money without anyone tracking them. Once an individual gives them the number, they can take the full value without anyone knowing who they are. If someone on the phone asks an individual to buy a gift card and call them back with the number, transfer money with bitcoin, wire transfer, or other non-traceable payment, it is a scam.

**Don't let them in before confirming.** All utility company employees carry credentials. If someone requesting entry into a home or place of business does not show a valid ID card, don't let that person in. If they do show credentials, the individual should call the utility company to confirm those credentials.

Consumers can also file a complaint with the Division of Consumer Protection. The New York State Division of Consumer Protection investigates Do Not Call violations and provides voluntary mediation between a consumer and a business when a consumer has been unsuccessful at reaching a resolution on their own. The Consumer Assistance Helpline 1-800-697-1220 is available Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm, excluding State Holidays, and consumer complaints can be filed at any time at [www.dos.ny.gov/consumerprotection](http://www.dos.ny.gov/consumerprotection). The Division can also be reached via @NYSConsumer or [www.facebook.com/nysconsumer](https://www.facebook.com/nysconsumer).

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