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Utility scams targeting Wisconsin customers, officials warn

By Gitte Laasby of the Journal Sentinel
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Scammers are trying to trick Wisconsin consumers into thinking they have past-due utility bills. The giveaway: The companies don't operate in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection said in a news release Friday that it has received a number of complaints and inquiries in January about two different utility scams. The scams are nationwide and invoke the names of two legitimate energy providers, Atmos Energy of Texas and Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) of California.

"The emails reference fake account numbers and direct consumers to visit linked websites to view their statements or to make a payment," DATCP wrote in its news release. "By clicking on any links in the messages, consumers risk having their systems infected with malware and losing personal or banking information to the scammers."

Atmos Energy and PG&E both have warnings about the scams on their websites. Neither company provides services to Wisconsin consumers, DATCP said.

As we reported in December, in August and in April, scammers have tried a similar approach in Wisconsin by phone.

DATCP had these tips for consumers who receive an email claiming they have an overdue utility bill from Atmos Energy or PG&E:

- Delete the email immediately.
- Don't click any links contained in the message.
- Don't download any attachments from the email.
- Don't provide any personal or banking information or reply to the message.
- Consumers who received a fraudulent PG&E email can report it to PG&E at CorporateSecurity@pge.com.
- Wisconsin consumers can file a complaint with DATCP online, by sending an e-mail to datcphotline@wisconsin.gov or by calling the hotline toll-free at (800) 422-7128.

Consumers targeted by the utility scam calls can find tips on what to do in this Public Investigator blog post.

For more consumer stories, scam alerts, viral stories and the occasional freebie, follow the Public Investigator on Twitter @GitteLaasbyMJS or get news to your Facebook feed by liking her page.