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NEWS RELEASE

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Hawai'i utilities mark Utility Scam Awareness Day with warning to customers: Stay vigilant over the holidays!

HONOLULU, Nov. 17, 2021 – With scam calls, phishing and more elaborate schemes on the rise, Hawai'i utilities are asking customers to remain vigilant as scammers ramp up their activity during the holidays. The warning comes on Utility Scam Awareness Day, a national event created to spotlight ripoffs aimed at utility customers.

Hawaiian Electric, Hawaiian Telcom, Hawai'i Gas, Honolulu Board of Water Supply and Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative, along with the state Office of Consumer Protection and Honolulu Police Department, are working to combat scammers who target customers by posing as bill collectors and utility workers.

Utilities have seen scammers get more creative in recent months, spoofing caller IDs so customers think the call is from a legitimate source or targeting third parties – such as real estate listing agents – to convince customers they need to pay overdue bills to avoid disconnection.

Customers need to be alert and recognize scams, especially when criminals threaten to disconnect service unless a payment is made.

“Consumers should be wary of anyone threatening disconnection and pressuring you to wire money or pay with gift cards,” said Stephen Levins, executive director of the State of Hawai'i Office of Consumer Protection. “It's safe practice to cut the call short and contact the utility's main office directly to verify your account status before providing any personal information or form of payment.”

Scammers target residents and businesses who rely on essential services such as electricity, water, gas and telecommunications.

The utilities offer the following tips:

- If the caller says your utility account is delinquent and threatens to shut off service immediately unless payment is made, it's a scam. Don't be fooled by the caller ID, which can be manipulated to show a legitimate phone number.
- If someone calls from a utility demanding immediate payment over the phone, via gift cards, money transfer, prepaid debit cards or by Bitcoin, it's a scam.
- If the caller asks to meet the customer in person to pick up a payment, it's a scam.

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- If you receive an email from your utility urging you to click on an embedded link or attachment to resolve a utility issue or pay a bill, think before you click. It's likely a scam.
- If a utility worker shows up at your home or place of business, ensure that person is wearing official attire with a logo, driving a properly labeled vehicle and carrying company identification. When in doubt, call the utility's customer service center.

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