



**Hawaiian
Electric**



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Scammers preying on vulnerable utility customers, targeting small businesses during peak hours

HONOLULU, Nov. 16, 2022 – With worries about the current economy and making ends meet, many utility customers in Hawai'i are particularly vulnerable to scams. A proliferation of cryptocurrency kiosks and cash apps for mobile phones has only added to the problem.

That's one reason why today, which is Utility Scam Awareness Day, 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 joining forces to spread the word about the latest tactics being used by scammers.

In several recent cases, consumers were told they would have service shut off immediately unless they went to a Bitcoin machine to make a payment. Bitcoin kiosks have been popping up across the state in places like gas stations, laundromats, smoke shops and mini marts. Just in the past month, one recent victim paid over \$12,000 in multiple payments at a kiosk in a small restaurant.

"Cryptocurrency is not accepted as payment for any utility service in Hawai'i, whether electricity, phone, internet, gas or water," said Stephen Levins, executive director of the State of Hawai'i Office of Consumer Protection. "If you get a threatening call demanding payment by Bitcoin, gift cards, money transfer, or prepaid debit cards, just hang up and call your utility directly."

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 you in person to pick up a payment, it's a scam.

– more –

- 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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