

Red Deer RCMP Warn of Utility Scammers

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Red Deer RCMP have received a number of reports recently of scammers targeting small businesses and claiming to represent their utility company. In this recent spate of scam attempts, scammers claim to represent Enmax and threaten to shut off the business's power immediately if they aren't paid through electronic money transfers. In most cases, a quick call to Enmax by skeptical business owners has revealed the call to be a scam, but several local business owners were taken in by these aggressive scammers.

In previous versions of this fraud, scammers have claimed to represent various electricity and gas providers and threatened to disconnect utilities immediately unless they were paid through pre-paid VISA cards. It's common for scammers to contact businesses just before peak business times or weekends, using the time of day to pressure their target into making a hasty decision for fear of losing business activity over the weekend.

"It's a red flag when a caller asks you to pay them through electronic money transfers or by pre-paid credit cards or gift cards," says Constable Derek Turner of the Red Deer RCMP. "Credible businesses do not accept payment in these ways. Scammers use them because the money is then nearly impossible to track."

RCMP offer these tips to protect yourself from scammers:

- Independently verify the caller's claim by contacting the business they are claiming to represent; don't use a phone number given to you by the caller – look the business's number up yourself.
- Never provide personal information (bank account information, SIN, date of birth, credit card numbers or PIN) at the door or over the phone, unless you have initiated the interaction.
- Do not let callers or people at your door pressure you to take immediate action.
- No legitimate business will take payment via pre-paid credit cards or gift cards – this is a sure sign of a scam.
- Ask yourself: if you have an account with a utility provider and a standard way of making payment to them, why would your utility provider suddenly request that you pay them in a different way?

For more information on scams and frauds visit www.antifraudcentre.ca.

Cst. Derek Turner, Red Deer RCMP
403-304-7764