

Utilities are raising awareness about scams

By Tracy Warren

When a scammer called Florida pet clinic operator Cindy Evers last year and demanded immediate payment on an overdue electric bill, it sounded real.

“They knew my account number and gave me a figure that I owed that’s close to what I usually pay on my electric bill,” Evers said. She paid, even though, in the back of her mind, she knew her payment wasn’t late.

“I have pets under sedation, and I’m taking care of animals. I think I just panicked, thinking they were going to shut my electricity off. I did what they told me to do.” Evers lost \$900 because the call was a scam.

The scam that duped Evers has been plaguing utility consumers across North America for several years, robbing them of millions.

Now, utilities are fighting back.

Recently, more than 80 utilities and energy industry organizations from across the U.S. and Canada joined forces to recognize the first-ever North American Utilities United Against Scams Day on November 16, 2016.

Electric co-ops have increased their communication efforts, sending information directly to members and encouraging local TV stations and newspapers to warn citizens about the scam, how it

works and what people should do and not do, if they are ever targeted.

Even the wariest consumers can be duped, however. The scammers are developing new tactics every day.

The “past due” scam, similar to the one Florida customer Evers experienced, goes something like this: A customer gets a call from an 800-number that looks like a valid utility company phone number.

Widely available spoofing software allows crooks to display what appears to be an official number on caller IDs. The caller threatens to cut off power if the customer doesn’t pay.

But here’s the giveaway: The crook will demand payment via a prepaid debit card or money order. And he’ll ask for it within a specified time frame—often an hour or less.

The scammer may even quote an amount that sounds like your typical monthly bill. That way, the threat has even more credibility.

Scammers might direct the customer to a specific store nearby that sells the prepaid cards and instruct the customer to put money on the card and provide the card number to the scammer.

Some scammers have even been bold enough to contact potential victims in person, coming to the member’s house.



Here are some tips on how to protect yourself:

- Do not assume the name and number on your caller ID are legitimate. Caller IDs can be spoofed.
- Never share your personal information, including date of birth, Social Security number or banking account information.
- Never wire money to someone you don’t know.
- Do not click links or call numbers in unexpected emails or texts – especially those asking for your account information.
- Most utilities will NOT require their customers to purchase prepaid debit cards or money orders to avoid an immediate disconnection.
- If you receive a call that sounds like it may be a scam, or if you believe the call is a scam, hang up, call the police and report the incident to your local utility.

How you can help

You can alert your family members and friends. Share the scammers’ tactics described in this article or those you have heard about. You can also help raise awareness and warn others by reposting scam awareness information on social media; use the hashtag #stopscams.

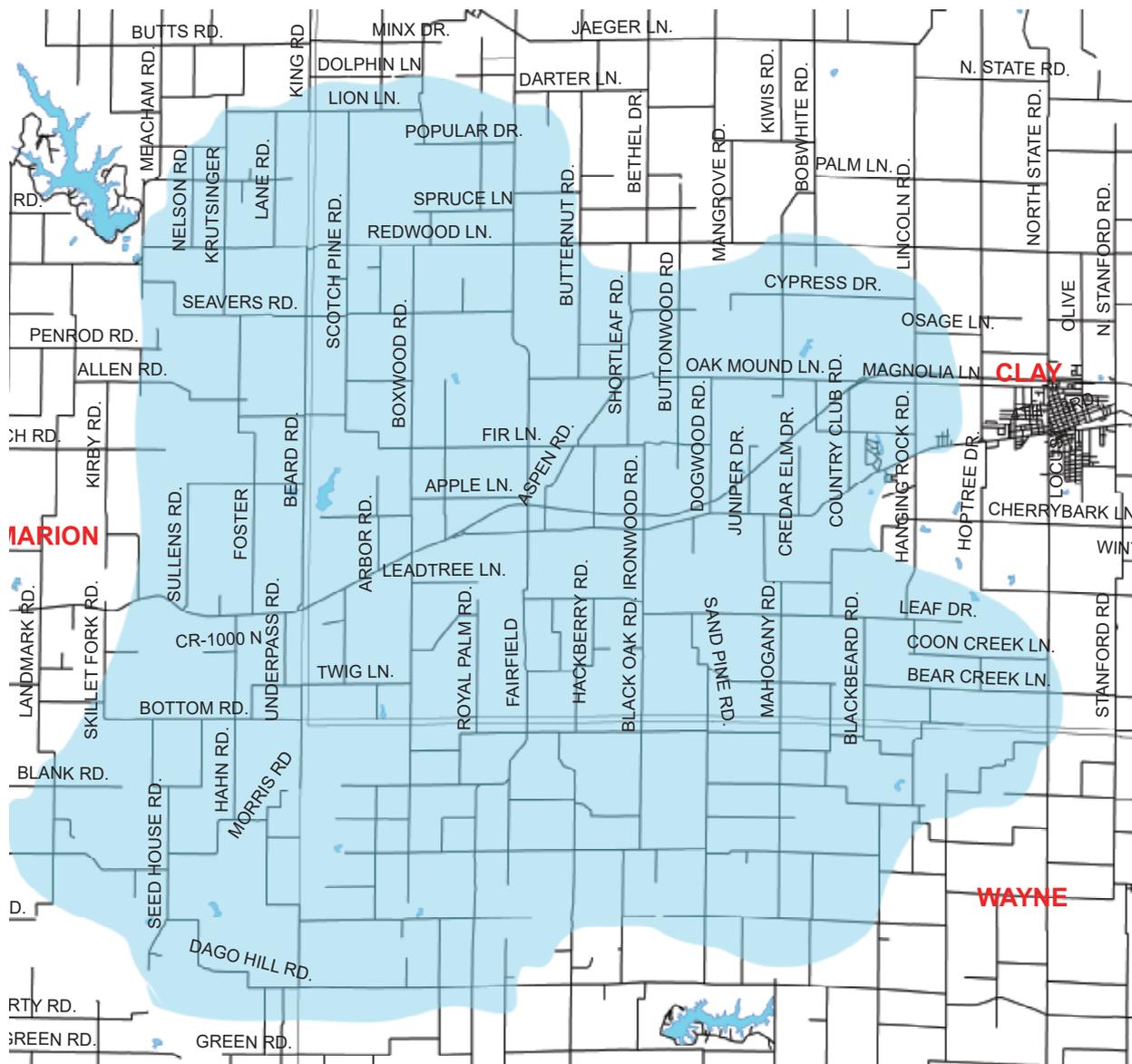
Tracy Warren writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation’s 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

Line clearance programs are a vital part of any utility's annual work plan. At Clay Electric Co-operative we take great pride in the efforts we have made to keep lines clear of trees, and keep safe, dependable, reliable, uninterrupted

power serving your homes and farms.

The map pictured, shows the Xenia sub area where we will be concentrating our efforts this year. We will also be spot spraying various problem areas on the entire

system that have grown back into the lines. If you have any questions concerning our line clearance techniques, please contact our office (662-2171 or 800-582-9012).



In order to process refunds for capital credit accounts, Clay Electric Co-operative is attempting to contact members, or their heirs, that received electric service during the years 1958 – 1961.

Please go to this link -

<http://www.cec.coop/content/unclaimed-capital-credits>

to view the entire list of unclaimed refunds. If you recognize a name on the list, please let the person know they are due a refund.

Minutes of Board of Trustees Meeting

Regular meeting November 29, 2016

Trustees present were: Bill Croy, Frank Czynzewski, Neil Gould, Frank Herman, Kevin Logan, Bob Pierson, Richard Rudolphi, Danny Schnepfer and Greg Smith. Also present were Executive Vice President/General Manager Ed VanHoose, Cooperative Attorney Melanie Pearce, and Operations Mgr. Luke Johnson. The invocation was given by Frank Herman.

Approved the agenda as presented and amended by Gen. Mgr. VanHoose.

Approved the minutes of the Regular meeting held October 24, 2016.

Accepted 8 new members for service.

Canceled 15 members no longer receiving service.

Approved a list of work orders for October 2016 in the amount of \$55,013.20.

Approved the disbursement list for October, 2016. **Discussed** purchase of brush chemicals.

Discussed attendees for the 2017 NRECA Annual Meeting of Members in San Francisco, CA. Gen. Mgr. VanHoose to make travel plans for attendees.

Reviewed NRECA report to AIEC November 2016.

Reviewed CFC Quarterly Loan Payment made by CECI.

Reviewed CFC letter dated October 2016 thanking CECI for its contribution to the Integrity Fund.

Heard a report by Trustee Herman regarding SIPC, specifically financial information. **Reviewed** proposed 2017 Budget revisions. **Discussed** Coincidental Peak rate versus Non-Coincidental Peak discussion with SIPC Management. Gen. Mgr. VanHoose distinguishes between cost of study and rate design and how SIPC Management should be concerned simply with cost. **Informed** that a peak rate vote should be made early in 2017 to be addressed in 2018 budget.

Approved Waiver of 90-day notice requirement as to Rate Adjustment as laid out in SIPC Wholesale Power Rate Schedule effective January 1, 2017.

Heard a report by Trustee Logan concerning the recent AIEC meeting, specifically addressing financial information.

Reviewed November 2016 Illinois ACRE newsletter.

Reviewed Participant Guide NRECA course # 943.1 titled "Conversation Skills Outside the Boardroom." **Discussed** substance of training.

Heard a report by Trustee Smith as to the Building and Grounds Committee meeting.

Reviewed bids from Illini Builders, EWR Architects, and Fager McGee. **Discussed** Committee's desire for a timely and unanimous decision as

to proceeding with building a new headquarters facility due to impact on Budgeting, and magnitude of the project.

Discussed Member concerns. **Were Informed** the committee is not yet asking for a decision as to choice of builder.

Informed by Gen. Mgr. VanHoose as to possible grant funds for certain aspects of the building. **Approved** proceeding for budget purposes only, with the decision to build a new headquarters.

Heard a report by Trustee Gould as to Purchasing Committee meeting. **Discussed** disposition of old tree truck parts, and 2017 Capital items including truck replacements, tractor implements, meter replacement strategy, and a new AMR Server. **Reviewed** bids related to the same. **Informed** by Gen. Mgr. VanHoose that as to truck replacements acquisition of trucks are more than a year backlog therefore payment for trucks so ordered will come out of the 2018 budget. **Heard** a report by Trustee Gould as to possible contractors for 2017 Work Plan.

Heard a report by President Rudolphi, and Trustee Logan concerning Executive Committee. **After Discussion**, Executive Committee opts not to change the past practice of deferring relevant items and simply addressing such items as a full Board.

Heard a financial report by Gen. Mgr. VanHoose as to the following;

- Reviewed** Form 7/Operations Report
- Reviewed** October cash flow report.
- Reviewed** SIPC October power bill.
- Reviewed** October power factor.
- Reviewed** October power cost adder.
- Reviewed** US Bank October Credit Card statements. Informed of One Card Rebate from U.S. Bank.
- Reviewed** October Financial Trend Analysis.

Reviewed 2017 draft Budget. Gen. Mgr. VanHoose will ask for approval of the 2017 Budget at next month's meeting after review and input from CECI Board and recommendations of the various Committees.

Heard a report by Op. Mgr. Johnson as to General Safety Report, specifically as to Tree Trimmer's attempts to resolve clearance issues, and as to monthly AIEC Safety meetings, monthly substation and regulator inspections, testing on trucks and equipment, and his attendance of the Safety Leadership Summit in Fort Worth, TX. **Heard** a recommendation by Gen. Mgr. VanHoose as to the creation of a safety recognition program for CECI employees.

Heard Managers report by Gen. Mgr. VanHoose as follows:

- Reported** on the swap of the Line Clearance boom and bed to the

Chassis of an unrepairable digger unit; Informed that cost savings were realized.

- Report** as to CECI/Ameren Switching Agreement, thereafter Agreement was approved.
- Reviewed** a Certificate from NRECA recognizing CECI as a 5 Star Co-op.
- Heard** a report as to an e-mail addressing Capital Credit issues.
- Heard** a report as to Overtime Ruling addressing Fair Labor Standards Act Rules; rules are again stayed in enactment.
- Heard** a report as to MJM Electric Cooperative and USDA Funding Expanded Healthcare in Carlinville.
- Heard** a report as to CRC Metrics.
- Reviewed** Recyclable Metal Theft Task Force Report October 2016.
- Reminded** of the upcoming meetings dates and time changes.
- Reminded** of the Board and Employee Christmas Party.
- Heard** a report as to fuel bids submitted by Knapp's and South Central FS; thereafter, **Approved** the lowest bid submitted by Knapp's.

Thereafter said Managers Report was Approved.

Reviewed Thank You cards from the Activity Fund at the Flora Care Center, and From Gateway Water Co. for assistance in installation of gate posts.

Approved the retirement of Capital Credits to the estate of one deceased Member, pursuant to Cooperative Policy.

Adjournment.

Clay Electric Co-operative, Inc.

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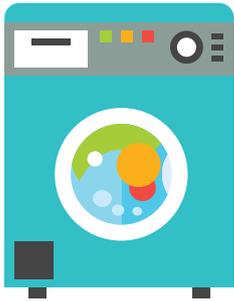




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