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FirstEnergy Utilities Urge Customers to 'Hang Up, Don't Pay Up' When Suspected Scammers Call

Akron, Ohio – With utility scams on the rise, real customers of FirstEnergy (NYSE: FE) utilities are speaking out about their encounters with fraudsters in a mini documentary released today. The video, "Hang Up, Don't Pay Up: When a Scammer Calls," features two business owners contacted by phone scammers impersonating FirstEnergy electric company employees, and provides tips for avoiding scams.

The con artists claimed the businesses had unpaid electric bills and threatened to shut off power if an immediate payment was not made. In both cases, the scammer's phone number was falsified so the caller ID appeared to be a legitimate call, complete with an automated voice menu that mimicked that of their electric company. This common scam is called "caller ID spoofing."

These customer stories are merely a snapshot of the ever-growing list of scams targeting utility customers across the country. Last year, FirstEnergy's utilities received 959 reports of scams from customers—more than twice the number of reports received in 2016. The actual number of scam attempts is even higher since most are only reported to law enforcement or go unreported.

"Scammers can be very convincing and often target those who are most vulnerable, like senior citizens or business owners who rely on electric service to run their business and make a living," said Gary W. Grant, vice president of customer service

for FirstEnergy Utilities. "We want others to hear directly from victims of attempted utility scams, in hopes they'll learn how to spot a scam in the future. Most important, if you ever receive a call demanding immediate payment to your electric utility, hang up, don't pay up."

With warmer weather on its way this spring, both residential and business customers should also be on alert for door-to-door visits from scammers who demand immediate payment to avoid service disconnection. Although the scammers work year-round, they are most active in the winter and summer months, when people cannot go without heat or air conditioning.

The "Hang Up, Don't Pay Up" video is featured on FirstEnergy's award-winning Scam and Fraud Information website. This site describes some of the most widespread schemes targeting utility customers, and offers facts and safety reminders that can help customers avoid becoming a victim of these crimes. Customers are urged to keep the following tips in mind to help ensure the safety of their family, property and personal information:

- Customers with past-due accounts will receive a written notice of their account status, with instructions on how to avoid disconnection of service.
- While FirstEnergy representatives oftentimes make courtesy calls to customers to remind them about an outstanding balance, they would explain how a payment can be made using the established payment options. They will not demand payment over the phone or at a particular physical location.
- FirstEnergy field collectors – carrying company-issued photo identification – will offer customers with past-due accounts the opportunity to pay their bill in person before shutting them off. This does not apply to Pennsylvania customers.

- FirstEnergy does not accept prepaid debit cards or wire transfers as payment, and their representatives will not demand bank or credit card information over the phone.
- Customers who suspect a scam should hang up the phone/close the door, and call the local police then FirstEnergy. Never dial the phone number the scammers provide.

"We encourage customers to contact us directly using the phone number listed on our website and on their billing statement if they need to verify the status of their electric account or the confirm the identity of a FirstEnergy employee," said Grant. "When in doubt, always give us a call."

FirstEnergy is dedicated to safety, reliability and operational excellence. Its 10 electric distribution companies form one of the nation's largest investor-owned electric systems, serving customers in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, West Virginia, Maryland and New York. The company's transmission subsidiaries operate more than 24,000 miles of transmission lines that connect the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions. Visit FirstEnergy online at www.firstenergycorp.com and follow FirstEnergy and its operating companies on Twitter @FirstEnergyCorp, @OhioEdison, @ToledoEdison, @IlluminatingCo, @W_Penn_Power, @Penn_Power, @Penelec, @Met_Ed, @JCP_L, @PotomacEdison, @MonPowerWV.

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