



ENERGY CONNECTIONS

SEPTEMBER 2015

Stay Alert



NorthWestern Energy again is warning customers about a scam involving collection of allegedly overdue utility bills. A number of business and residential customers in our service area recently reported receiving suspicious collection calls.

More than 30 customers reported suspicious calls to NorthWestern within a one-week period last month. At least two customers have made payments to the scammers using pre-paid debit cards purchased at grocery stores. The cards are available at other retailers also. The two customers lost nearly \$2,000 to the scammers.

Variations of the collection scam have been making the rounds across the nation over the past several years.

The scam artists demand immediate payment and threaten to cut utility service. They tell customers to purchase the cards and then provide them the number, allowing them to take the money.

The scammers can be very convincing and often use “spoofing” technology that makes it appear that the call is coming from NorthWestern Energy.

NorthWestern reminds customers to be vigilant when it comes to anyone seeking payment information on utility bills, either in person or via the telephone or Internet.

NorthWestern will provide past-due notices before terminating service. If you receive a disconnect notice, don't supply any personal information unless you are sure you are indeed working with the utility. NorthWestern never asks customers to use a prepaid debit card for payment.

Customers with questions or concerns about potential scams should contact NorthWestern Energy to report concerns or questionable calls. Montana customers can contact NorthWestern at (888) 467-2669. In Nebraska and South Dakota, customers should call (800) 245-6977.

Hunting safety reminder

Fall will soon be upon us and for many, it's an exciting time. Thousands of state residents will take to the field, with bows, rifles and shotguns in hand, in search of upland birds, waterfowl and big game.

Hunting is a deeply rooted tradition across our service area. The mountains of Montana and the fields of South Dakota and Nebraska provide abundant grounds that many hunters will seek out and in doing so will cross paths with our utility lines and poles, signs, substations and transmission structures.

The electric and gas infrastructure is what allows NorthWestern to provide safe, reliable and affordable energy to our nearly 693,000 customers. Unfortunately, during every hunting season, some pieces of this infrastructure are damaged by vandals. The cost of the damage, whether it's to power lines, signs or substations, quickly adds up. And, even greater than the financial implications, damaged utility lines and equipment may also cause a significant safety hazard which could harm unknowing people passing by.

Ultimately, it's all of our customers who pick up the tab for the damage caused by a few. The cost of repairing or replacing damaged equipment is passed along in charges on utility bills.

Help us help you. Please don't shoot at power lines, insulators, signs or any above-ground natural gas equipment. Such acts are senseless and lead to unnecessary expense and even service outages.

The vast majority of hunters who head to the hills and fields are conscientious, law-abiding folks who value their opportunity to hunt and enjoy the outdoors. Just as these people would report poaching or other illegal hunting-related activity to authorities, we ask that you act as NorthWestern's eyes and ears in the field and keep a watchful eye for those who might inflict damage on utility infrastructure. Making note of vehicle descriptions and license-plate numbers can greatly assist law enforcement and NorthWestern in finding those responsible for vandalism.

Please call 911 to report illegal activity to law enforcement. Call NorthWestern Energy immediately if you spot damaged electrical or natural gas lines. Please remember to keep a safe distance from any NorthWestern infrastructure that appears to be damaged or unsafe.

Fall is a wonderful time. With your help, we can make it even better!



NorthWestern
Energy
Delivering a Bright Future

On the road

Have you ever driven down a highway or country road and noticed warning signs along the way? As part of a comprehensive safety plan, these signs have been placed to warn you about the presence of underground natural gas transmission pipelines. The pipelines are under high pressure, so the natural gas can reach the communities they serve. While these pipelines consistently provide safe and reliable natural gas service, a pipeline that has been struck or damaged can result in a leak.

Signs of a natural gas pipeline leak may include:

- A hissing or whooshing sound
- Dirt being blown into the air
- Water bubbling or shooting into the air from a pond, creek or puddle
- A peculiar odor
- Dying shrubs or grass, perhaps near healthy plantings

If you observe any signs of a gas pipeline leak:

- Extinguish smoking materials and other small flames
- DO NOT attempt to extinguish a burning gas leak
- Contractors: Turn off and abandon equipment, and do not attempt to move any machinery
- Eliminate other sources of ignition (e.g. a nearby car with the engine running, cell phones)
- Call 911 from a safe distance. Do not re-enter the area until you have been advised that it is safe

Have a safe harvest

At NorthWestern Energy, we pride ourselves on delivering safe, reliable power to your farmsteads and homes. That's why we insist you follow these safety tips to ensure you and everyone else in your operation stay safe when farming:

- Tour your property and locate all overhead power lines in order to keep large equipment at least 10 feet clear.
- Before digging on your property, call 811 to have underground utility lines identified for free.

Storm Restoration 101

Do you ever wonder how utilities like NorthWestern Energy work to restore power after a major storm? Probably not: unless a storm just rolled through and you're out of power. Every situation is unique, but here's how it works.

Our crews head out as soon as it's safe to do so to begin assessing the damage. Meanwhile, our customer service representatives, engineers, dispatchers, warehouse personnel, community relations and communications staff are working to respond to customers and make sure that field staff have what they need to do their jobs. We work from the largest to the smallest. So transmission lines and substations get first priority because they're needed to power the distribution system to homes and businesses. At the same time, crews that are working on the distribution system take a similar approach by working on the circuits and feeders first. These are larger lines that feed neighborhoods and commercial districts. As power is restored to these facilities, crews begin tackling the individual scattered outages in the area.

Downed lines and poles often accompany major storm damage. Areas with a lot of trees complicate restoration due to the length of time it takes to safely remove trees and limbs from lines. Often tree crews are called in to work on tree removal while power crews are working on restoration. Typically, smaller individual outages are caused by tree damage. If the services have been damaged to your home, you may need to have a qualified electrician repair the damage before we can restore electricity.

While it may be tempting to try and remove storm damage or tree limbs from power lines, please DON'T. The line may still be energized even when it's on the ground and the threat of shock and electrocution is very real.

Extended outages are an inconvenience and there are alternatives available if you need medical assistance – never hesitate to contact the American Red Cross for support, and always make sure you are prepared and well stocked in case of the loss of power.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Q. Why is it important to report my outage to NorthWestern Energy?**
- A.** Never assume someone else has reported a power outage. As more customers report a problem with their service, the information helps our outage management system pinpoint the cause and speed up the restoration process.

Contact us...

MONTANA

Customer Contact Center (888) 467-2669
7 a.m. - 6 p.m. M-F
Emergency 24/7 Service
Call Before You Dig 811
Energy Efficiency (800) 823-5995

NEBRASKA

Customer Contact Center (800) 245-6977
7 a.m. - 6 p.m. M-F
Emergency 24/7 Service
Call Before You Dig 811

SOUTH DAKOTA

Customer Contact Center (800) 245-6977
7 a.m. - 6 p.m. M-F
Emergency 24/7 Service
Call Before You Dig 811

PAYMENT

Automated Phone
Payment Option: (800) 218-4959
(via checking, savings, or money market account)
SpeedPay Automated
Phone Payment Option: (877) 361-4927
(via credit card account)

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