

## Consumer Alert

Communities Affected: Ontario | Date: April 17, 2020

# Consumer Alert: Beware of scams during the COVID-19 emergency

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) is aware of increasing efforts by scam artists attempting to take advantage of consumer uncertainty during this COVID-19 emergency. The OEB has taken steps to ensure that the power to your home or low-volume small business **cannot be disconnected** for non-payment by your utility until July 31, 2020. If you receive a message, text or phone call from someone posing as a utility representative and threatening to disconnect your power, do not respond to it - **contact your utility directly** using the telephone number displayed on your bill.

The OEB believes that the risk of loss of electricity service due to arrears should not be an added source of concern for consumers at this time. On March 19, 2020, the OEB extended the winter disconnection ban for non-payment until July 31, 2020 for all residential customers of licensed electricity distributors and expanded the ban to also protect low-volume small business customers. The OEB has also called on electricity distributors to focus efforts on promoting solutions for customers that have arrears and on increasing awareness of support that may be available to customers. A number of distributors have already taken advantage of the flexibility in the OEB's customer service rules to provide relief to their customers by, for example, extending the date for payment of electricity bills.

### Consumer Tips:

- Beware of messages with COVID-19 in the subject line and claiming to be from your utility. There have been several reports of emails, texts and websites sharing fake information about bill relief programs, refunds and alternative payment methods during the COVID-19 emergency.
- Protect your personal information – Do not feel compelled to share your personal information. Your utility bill is private. It contains personal information like your account number and energy usage.
- Remain vigilant and continue to use safe web browsing and email practices. Make sure you are accessing a safe and trusted source such as the utility's website or call centre telephone number **exactly** as displayed on your bill.

Consumers with questions or concerns about any suspicious communications claiming to be from their utility are also encouraged to contact the OEB.

- Call (Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.): 1-877-632-2727 (toll-free within Ontario) or 416-314-2455 (within Greater Toronto Area)
- Text: 1-844-621-9977 (toll-free within Ontario) or 416-544-5190 (within Greater Toronto Area)
- Email: [consumerrelations@oeb.ca](mailto:consumerrelations@oeb.ca)

## Resources:

- Consumers concerned about any suspicious communications can also contact the [Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre](#) or call 1-888-495-8501.
- Learn more about how the [OEB protects consumers](#).
- Find out if you qualify for special [financial assistance programs](#) for low-income customers.
- See what measures the OEB is taking in response to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#).