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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**BBB Alert: Don't Let this Utility Scam Leave You Out in the Cold**

**Roanoke, VA** (*January 20, 2015*) – Winter has arrived and as the temperature continue to drop, heating costs continue to rise. Utility bills aren't the only thing on the rise- the nasty weather is also attracting a nasty scam.

Businesses in Western Virginia are reporting receiving phone calls from individuals claiming to be their electric utility company threatening to turn off their power unless an immediate payment is made. The caller claims to represent Appalachian Power and requests payment through a pre-paid debit card.

Appalachian Power, a unit of American Electric Power, has issued the following alert on their website:

*Thieves are calling our customers, threatening to shut off power unless an immediate payment is made. Appalachian Power never asks for pre-paid debit cards for payment. Please use our authorized payment methods, and call us at (800) 956-4237 if you have questions or concerns.*

The caller may sound official, and may threaten to immediately cut off the power if payment is not received. One business owner reported to BBB that the call came from a 1-877-303-0600 number and claimed to be American Electric Power. We called on 1/17/15 and a recording claimed to be American Electric Power. When we called the number just three days later on 1/20/15, we heard a recording stating we had reached the "NV Energy Disconnection Dept." NV Energy is a legitimate utility company based out of Nevada. It appears the scammers are using the same set of phone numbers, and are re-recording their messages using the name of a utility company that serves the zip code they are currently targeting.

"If anyone calls you and demands immediate payment accompanied by threats, hang up the phone," says Julie Wheeler, President and CEO of BBB Serving Western VA. "A legitimate company will not operate in this manner. If you have an account with the company the caller is claiming to represent, use a verified number to call the company to check the status of your account. Never use the number supplied by the caller."

BBB advises the following:

- Confirm that you are speaking to a utility representative. If you have any concerns, tell the caller that you will independently check the phone number for the utility to verify the caller's identity and information. The toll free number for Virginia AEP consumers is 1-800-956-4237.
- Be wary of anyone demanding immediate payment or payment in forms that are difficult to trace, such as Western Union, MoneyGram or GreenDot MoneyPak cash cards.
- Never give your credit card, debit card, Social Security, ATM, checking or savings account numbers to anyone who comes to your home, calls or sends an email requesting information.
- Never allow anyone claiming to be a utility service person into your home unless you have scheduled an appointment and the person has proper identification. Contact police if you become concerned about your safety.
- If you believe you may be the victim of a scam, you may contact your utility company, or you may call the BBB at (800) 533-5501.

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