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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **HOSTILE PHONE SCAMMERS POSING AS POWER COMPANY DEMANDING "PAY UP OR GET SHUT OFF"**

**Scammers Sound Convincing, Spoof CallerID Numbers, Quickly Turn Into Bullies**

**(FREEHOLD)** Phone scammers are switching gears and using a different tactic in their quest to con people out of their hard-earned money with hostile callers claiming to be from the local power company and demanding immediate payment using a pre-paid debit card or face instant darkness, announced Acting Monmouth County Prosecutor Christopher J. Gramiccioni.

"Don't be bullied by these unscrupulous operators. Nobody doing good business is calling you to threaten you. Companies want to work with you during these trying economic times and want to continue their relationship with their customers. Nastiness, threats and bullying tactics are not acceptable business practices – these callers are scammers trying to steal your hard-earned money – and the demand of payment using a pre-paid debit card is a huge red-flag everybody needs to notice," Gramiccioni said.

In recent weeks, there have been reports from people across the region receiving phone calls from scammers posing as Jersey Central Power & Light (JCP&L) employees who quickly threaten to shut off power at a residence or business unless direct payment is made using a pre-paid debit card such as a Green Dot card.

The JCP&L phone scam is just one of many scams operating in Monmouth County and across the country. Recently, the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office detailed a similar IRS scam and there are countless other ploys being run to prey on the most vulnerable populations. The scammers rely on deceiving their prey through a bullying strategy of misinformation, confusion and scare tactics. The best way to fight against these rip-off artists is to be aware of your individual situation, to double check anything that appears to be a strange request and don't fall into their trap of fear and intimidation.

The con artists sound very convincing and may even know a lot about you or your business. The call can look very convincing as well with the CallerID being spoofed to indicate it is coming from a JCP&L phone number – even when it is not.

"Customers should know that if they get a call from someone demanding payment of their electric bill by using a Green Dot card they are being scammed and should report the crime to local authorities. JCP&L would never call and give a customer an hour or two hours to make a payment before turning off their service," explained Anthony Hurley, JCP&L Vice President of Operations. "While a company representative may phone a customer whose bill is in arrears to remind them that a payment is due, we would explain how a payment can be made using established payment options."

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JCP&L, a subsidiary of FirstEnergy, does not demand payment over the phone to avoid an impending termination of service and does not require payment over the phone via specific means, like using Green Dot cards or any other pre-paid debit card, Hurley added.

Anyone who suspects they have received a scam call should contact their local police department.

JCP&L also urges any customer who has doubts about a call from someone claiming to be from JCP&L, especially one demanding immediate payment, to call JCP&L's customer service number at 1-800-662-3115.

JCP&L has numerous bill payment options, including:

- eBill Electronic Billing – customers can receive their bill and make payments electronically.
- Pay with a credit card.
- Equal Payment Plan – uniform bill payments can be made to avoid seasonal fluctuation of payment amounts.
- Pay by phone using FirstEnergy's automated phone system.
- Pay in Person – customers may make payments, for a nominal fee per transaction, at any authorized payment agent location. Fees may vary by individual location.
- Pay by Mail – customers may choose to receive their bill in the mail and make a payment the same way.
- JCP&L customers can sign up for these payment options online at [www.firstenergycorp.com](http://www.firstenergycorp.com).

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