• Special to the Leader & Times

WICHITA — Black Hills Energy has received a scam report involving unknown parties who may be targeting its customers and demanding money.

Fraudulent callers contact customers to indicate that a payment must be made within a short amount of time (e.g., 30 minutes) before a technician will arrive to disconnect service if they do not pay. Some are even using spoofing technology where customers' caller ID displays the utility, further enhancing the deception. Reports have also suggested the scammers are primarily targeting small, commercial establishments, as well as populations that may not fully understand English and/or traditional billing and marketing practices.

If Black Hills Energy customers have concerns about anyone claiming to represent the company, an immediate call to local law enforcement is always a good option. Additionally, customers can call the utility's toll-free, 24-hour emergency line at 800-694-8989. Black Hills Energy can confirm the legitimacy of the claim and can also confirm billing information, including the amount due and payment history, and whether an employee was dispatched to your location.

In addition, Black Hills Energy employees are required to carry a company-issued photo ID at all times and will gladly wait for customers to contact customer service associates to verify their identity. In any instance, the number to call for verification can be found on monthly bills or the company's website.

Additional tips to avoid falling prey to scammers include:

• Don’t give in to a high-pressure call seeking personal information. If someone calls claiming to represent your local utility and they demand immediate payment or personal information, hang up and call the customer service number on your utility bill.

• Do not provide your Social Security number, credit card numbers or bank account information to anyone during an unsolicited phone call or an unannounced visit.

• Never allow anyone representing a utility into your home unless you have scheduled an appointment or are aware of a confirmed problem. Any time a utility employee arrives at your door, require the employee to produce proper identification, and do not hesitate to confirm the visit with the utility company via a phone call before permitting access to your property.